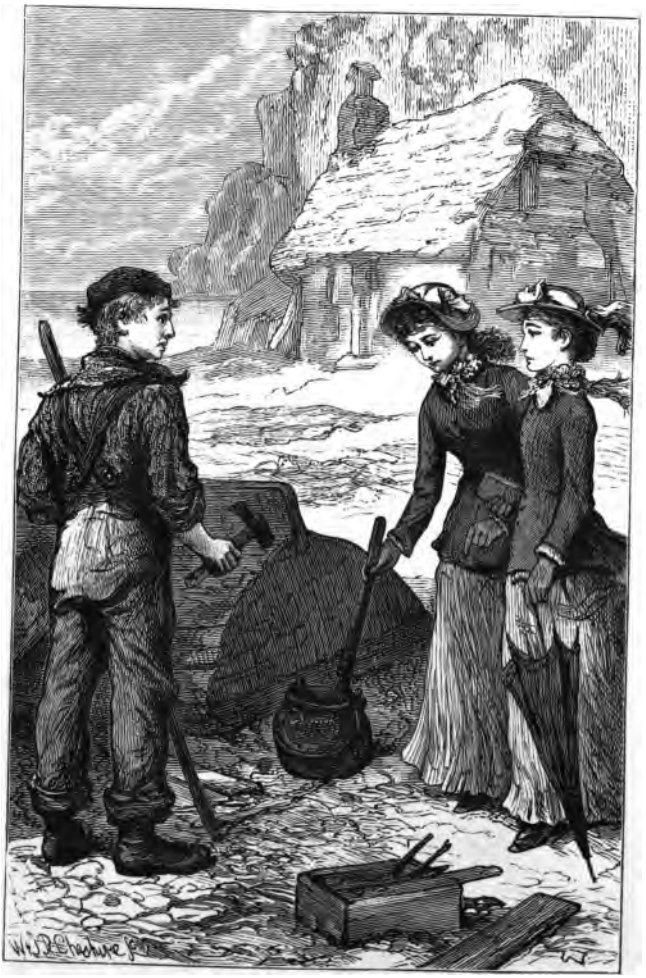
Hester Tracy

A SchoolRoom Story

by

A. Weber



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HATCHARDS

LONDON, PICCADILLY

MDCCCLXXXV

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By A. WEBER

AUTHOR OF "AT SIXES AND SEVENS," "MILES HARLING,"
"THE OLD HOUSE IN THE SQUARE,"
ETC. ETC.

ILLUSTRATED

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HESTER TRACY.

CHAPTER I.

HESTER AND REDGE.

"WHAT! *working*, Hester? reading, learning, cudgelling your brains on a morning like this, and in such holidays as these are going to be! I am going up to the Alder stream, and I thought you would come with me."

The speaker was a man, not very long ago a boy, who stood outside a window with his arms folded on the ledge, looking into a small dark-panelled room, bookish enough for a study—cosy enough for lighter matters.

A girl sat at a writing-table in the window, poring over maps and geography-book, her head of thick brown hair propped upon both hands, bent evidently upon not hearing, or rather upon not attending, for she did not look up.

There was a pause, during which that thrush in the lilac-bush outside sang—oh, how sweetly! Never before surely had it sung so loudly, so richly, so impudently, of the joy of doing nothing, of the folly of hard work in the beautiful spring-time, when all created

things and beings were meant to enjoy themselves. But it sang too—for those who would hear—of the never-resting energy which made the buds blossom, and the blossoms bear fruit.

A brilliant butterfly whirled into the room.

"There!" said the voice at the window again, "do you see that? The very butterflies leave the sunshine to come and hunt you out of these dark shades." The head went up from the books for an instant, then down again with a smothered laugh. "I declare I'll lasso you with my line if you don't look up and say something, Hess!" Not a word.

"I'll give you two minutes by my watch." Lower went the head down over the map, and with it went a finger carefully following the course of the Danube, and then as intently both head and finger were transported to the neighbouring exercise-book, where they were joined by a pen, which scratched away vigorously—for a minute only; and then, before the two minutes were up, down went the pen—up went the head—as with chin on her hands she faced her interlocutor, whose watch went back into his pocket at once. After shaking back her short waving hair once or twice, and trying to look steadily and reproachfully at the face in the window, she burst out into irrepressible laughter.

"Redge! it *is* a shame!" she said at last.

"Not at all," he replied coolly, without moving. "You came down here yesterday—only yesterday, for holidays. I saw nothing of you yesterday evening because you were with that sulky, disagreeable Violet."

"She couldn't help it, Redge; she was *so* tired after the journey!" exclaimed Hester, leaving her books and going up to the window; "besides, you were with papa and mamma and Dorothy all the evening, talking to them; you didn't even hear me say good night as I passed you at the piano when Dorothy was singing."

"All this does not explain such unwonted love of study on the loveliest day this year."

"I know it doesn't," she replied, with a little nod. "I was only trying to explain to you why poor Violet was cross, and why I couldn't talk to you,—but *I* can't explain why you wouldn't say good night to me. But I'm going to be very serious now—I am really, Redge. Do you know my marks have been so shamefully bad lately at school, and I have altogether been so idle, so naughty—well! perhaps not naughty exactly, but so larky, that breaking-up day was anything but jolly? Papa was angry, mamma was miserable, Dorothy sorrowful, and poor Vi actually cried."

"What *rot* it all is!" interrupted the young man impatiently.

"No, it isn't at all," said Hester, as impatiently. "Papa said that it was disgraceful to have the chance of such a good education as Vi and I have at the High School, and for me to profit by it so little—but, oh dear! I do *hate* thinking of profit! No, I mustn't say that," she added quickly, seeing a sympathetic gleam in her companion's eyes. "Papa was so kind, he only said that people who won't work are sure to come to grief. Do you think so too, Redge?" She put the question very simply; he pulled his moustaches and

looked up into the pine-tree above him before he answered that "he didn't know—he never thought about it."

"But they all say I must think about it." She went on: "'In the days of my youth, Father William,' you know—they remind me that I am very nearly fifteen, and have only three more years before me at school. *Only* three!" She groaned, "I wish I could think of them as 'only!' Perhaps by that time I shall love it all, perhaps I shall hate parties and all that, and be a regular Blue by that time. Sometimes I think Dorothy is going to be a Blue, for she does go to such a lot of classes and lectures, and all sorts of things, more than ever! But then she is dearer than ever too, isn't she? And Blues are not dear, are they?"

"The most abominable things on the face of the earth," he muttered.

"But you don't think Dorothy is that yet?" suggested Hester, with a twinkle in her eyes.

"Not yet; there's no knowing what she may become if she goes on bothering you much more with her incessant lectures about work. I believe she set you down to this hard labour now."

"She did nothing of the sort, so you are just wrong," said Hester indignantly. "I came in here directly after breakfast, because I thought I'd try to keep a resolution I made before we left London, to do a good two hours' work every day in the holidays. But, somehow, it's not so easy now as it was before you came. You have made my course of the Danube all go wrong; and did you say," she added hesitatingly, "did you say you were going to fish in the Alder stream?" He

nodded assent. "Then I *must* come too," she cried, in spite of all good intentions, "because I haven't seen it since last autumn, you know! and everything is so lovely this morning, and this map does look so hideous! I'll go and get the luncheon-basket, and see if the others will come too." All the pent-up inclinations were bursting forth now, as with a bound she dashed away from the window, brushing past the table so violently that the course of the Danube was swept on to the floor, in her own headlong course to the morning-room, or "lounge," as they called it generally.

"Will you all come with Redge and me to the Alder-stream?" she cried, as she stood on the two steps which led from the study straight down into the morning-room.

A head was raised from letter-writing in a remote corner of the room, a face that was good to look at was lifted quickly to meet Hester's, with the words: "Is Redge here? I have not seen him." Then as quickly the face was bent low down over her letters again.

"Hester, dear! gently!" said a nearer voice, her mother's, who was seated beside one of the large couches on which was lying a girl, smaller than Hester, but older, and who complained fretfully—"Hess! I wish you would think! My head does ache so!"

"Come out, then, it will do it good to be out," said Hester, reddening under the not unusual sense of having done the wrong thing.

"No, Violet is too tired, she has not quite recovered from the journey. We are reading aloud; and then by the afternoon she will be feeling better and able to drive out perhaps." This was said by her mother in the same gently quiet way, adding: "Shut the door,

Hessie dear, will you? for we have a window open, and there is too much draught."

Hester banged it; not intentionally, but carelessly. Once more the letter-writer's face was raised.

"You will be back for luncheon, won't you?"

Hester hesitated.

"Well, no; I don't think so, because you see we are going all the way to the stream. Mrs. Teague will pack the luncheon-basket, so we shan't want anything, and Redge never cares to eat whilst he is fishing. Why don't you come too, Dorothy?"

"Because I don't care to," was the reply; hastily adding, "because I have letters to write."

"Where *is* Reginald?" asked the mother.

"Outside—he wouldn't come in, because his boots were muddy"—and with that Hester retreated, so glad not to be stopped from going that she did not dare to wait for fuller permission, and Violet turned her face away to hide the fretful tears that would come because she was not so strong as Hester, and she did so wish that she was! And the mother went on reading soothingly; and Dorothy got up to bring a more comfortable cushion for Violet's head; and Hester started cheerily, with luncheon-basket on her arm, beside Reginald, who for some reason best known to himself was silent after Hester had announced—"None of the others care to come."

Their way lay for the most part through pine-woods, —tall, straight, red stems—flat, black-green tops,—deep blue sky between—whilst under foot lay the soft, brown pine-needles, which, as Lowell says, "hesh" so as you walk.

"Do you think Vi has grown at all, Redge?" asked Hester suddenly.

"Grown? Since when? Since she was a baby?" he said, roused from his reverie.

"No! since last Christmas?"

"I am sure I don't know; I scarcely looked at her last night," he replied.

"How very funny you are, Redge!" she exclaimed; "sometimes you never seem to see any one at all; when you are at the piano with Dorothy there always seems to be a fog for you over all the rest of the room! But I *do* hope poor Vi will grow soon, because she says her small size is 'the *curse* of her *life*;' it sounds very dreadful, doesn't it? but, do you know, she heard you say that once."

Reginald, who had begun to laugh, here checked himself, as he exclaimed: "Heard *me* say it!"

"Yes; it was one afternoon, last winter, in London. You had dropped in about four o'clock, and you came in to schoolroom tea—you know you do that sometimes, don't you, Redge? five days out of six sometimes, don't you? You and Dorothy came in together, papa came downstairs with you, but he turned off into the library; and you were talking just a little bit crossly, and I suppose you forgot the step by the door, for you stumbled and fell over the tea-table, and then you said: 'It's the curse of my life!' and Vi said: 'What do you mean? that step?' and you said: 'Yes, if you like,' and then you went and stood by the fire, with your back to us all; and Dorothy's face was very grave, and she was very silent. We have always called that step 'Redge's curse' ever since—Vi and I—and Vi said she liked

the expression very much; she said it was what she had been feeling all her life about her smallness, because you know she always says that people *will* treat her as if she were a little girl, and that her frocks will always be frocks."

"What ought they to be?" asked her amused companion.

"*Dresses* when they touch the ground; not till then. Why! do you know that every time Vi has a new one she goes and stands before mamma's pier-glass in hopes that it will be a real *dress;* but then, you see, those glasses always make even a long dress look shorter, so that I am afraid she will never be satisfied by that; it takes a great deal to satisfy Vi. But still I don't think she need call that 'a curse,' do you? She only said so to me; she must have been feeling it very much to say such a thing; you won't tell the others, will you? I was afraid you might, as it has made you laugh so, Vi *never* uses strong language *generally.*"

"But little girls should never use the word 'curse' at all," said Reginald gravely. Hester—tall, stout Hester, with the great liquid brown eyes full of sparkle—had been looking up straight into the pine-trees under which they were walking, watching two wood-pigeons sweeping through the tree-tops; now she suddenly brought her eyes down to the level of Reginald's face, which was far enough above her, but not quite so far as the pine-tops.

"You won't get a rise out of me by that, Redge; firstly, because I'm not a little girl, and nobody ever treats me as if I was—worse luck! they always expect

me to do everything correctly, as if I was grown up, almost."

"Secondly?"

"Secondly; because I never want to be old, as Vi does; I should hate to be treated with respect! I'd willingly be called 'little girl' all my life, if that would let me go on just as I am now, just as larkily, as freely, to be, and do, and say just what I like, and not to have to be steady and quiet ever. Nobody knows what I feel about work, Redge, except you; you and I—we both hate it, don't we?"

He whistled a long whistle, then said: "What's become of the course of the Danube?"

Hester's face fell, and she was silent for a minute.

"If *you* hadn't come, Redge," she said at last, slowly and deliberately, "I should have been mapping it all out now—I should indeed."

After that neither spoke for some time; perhaps the beauty of the morning was such, that it was sufficient simply to enjoy, as the thrush did; or perhaps Reginald did not quite care to be set down as the evil genius, Idleness. They were breaking away from the pine-woods now, and striking out across the moorland, where the young bracken was unfolding delicate green fronds, and the golden gorse was displaying itself among the shrubby heather; and little streams and little quags, the result of winter rains and overflowing springs, made it expedient here and there to jump. *The* stream was reached at length; crystal clear, though brown from its sandy bottom, it went meandering along between the heather tufts and bracken clumps; but here, where they stopped, was a mossy bank and a group of oak-trees,

remnant of forest days. Here our two halted—the fisherman to fish, the girl to open her luncheon-basket.

"And now good-bye to talking; fishing is the order of the day," she said, as she produced some hard-boiled eggs, slices of bread and butter, and some buns. "Isn't this delicious? and I am *so* hungry. I 'm glad you 're not, Redge, because Mrs. Teague has only put in enough——" She laughed, and stopped, for there was a goodly amount of provisions.

"Enough for a hungry Hester?" said the long-suffering fisherman, with a good-humoured smile; he did happen to be really very hungry, but he could forget himself sometimes. Indeed, his young friend Hester had a wonderful way of stirring the best that was in him, without meaning it in the very least.

Hours must have passed in almost perfect silence. Far away was a blue line of sea; the sun had gone behind a grey hazy veil. It was a perfect day for fishing; many trout were landed, but the last and the finest was lost, owing to an involuntary start on the part of Reginald, caused by an involuntary start on the part of Hester, who suddenly raised herself from the close investigation of a wild bees' hole to exclaim—

"O Redge, who *do* you think is coming to stay with us? I quite forgot all about him till this moment!"

Reginald checked an exclamation of anger as his fish dived away, and the next minute he said: "Who? You don't mean——"

"Yes, I do," she interrupted wofully, "it *is* the Professor, *alias* the 'Dry Stick.' I can't think what makes papa and mamma so fond of him."

"Then you will not be troubled much by my presence at Hengisthorne," observed Reginald; "and does his objectionable little daughter come with him?"

"Little Miss Prim? Yes. I am going to do all I can to shock her, little upstartish thing, with her clean collars and cuffs, and smooth pink hands and cheeks. Papa says the Professor wants a holiday. I shouldn't have thought he did, as he says 'Work, work, work,' always. I don't think I can keep quiet any longer, now that I have begun to think about them."

"Then, suppose you go off for a walk, and leave me to square up accounts with the big trout you frightened out of his wits just now."

"Did I? Did I *really?* I *am* sorry. Now Vi would never have done that; Dorothy wouldn't have done it—only me! It seems as if I could never do anything right for long together! If there is a right and a wrong, I *always* do the wrong first!"

She was standing quite still now, with her hands behind her, and there was dejection expressed in the very sweep of her feather as it hung over the hat that was pushed back and on one side, not in the least shading the face, that was troubled enough now; all the spring sunshine had gone out of it as out of the sky.

"Not much harm done in frightening a trout," murmured her companion, intent on his fly.

"Ah! but papa says that great things are shown in little. He always says, you know, that *you* show——" She stopped, finding herself suddenly on the very edge of an unintentional accusation, and that, too, of an old friend whom they were all far too fond of to wound intentionally.

"Says what?—go on," said Reginald sharply.

"No, I'd rather not," said Hester resolutely.

"But I would rather that you did," he said, as resolutely.

"Well, then, you promise that you don't mind?" she said, half timidly, half mischievously.

Reginald promised.

"Well—papa often says that if you were not so lazy in little things every day he should have more hopes of you. Now, Redgie, you promised that you wouldn't mind!" for, girl as she was, even Hester could see the cloud that came over his countenance; or, perhaps, it was hardly cloud so much as a vivid change of expression. "Dear Redgie!" she went on anxiously, "you look just as if I had pricked you. I wish now I had not told you—that's *another* stupid thing I've done."

"It's I who am stupid to mind it," he muttered, as he began putting up his fishing-tackle and preparing to start homewards.

"Yes, and you know after all," she added encouragingly, "I dare say nobody else but papa and Dorothy would think so much of those little things; because they are so fond of early breakfast, and think ten o'clock breakfast is dreadful waste of time; and then, you know, papa is so fond of reading, and you are not —not *very*, are you? And he doesn't care for tennis; he says a man ought always to be training for something, and he thinks you wouldn't even take the trouble to train for a boat-race or running. But he's very fond of you, Redgie, you know. He often says it wouldn't bother him so much if he were not very fond of you."

"I am very much obliged to him," was the answer, spoken in a tone that prevented Hester from saying another word. So they walked on in silence for some time after Hester's last comfortable assurance, she lingering behind sometimes to pick up fir-cones, longing to throw one at him and make him speak, but not presuming to do so in his present mood. At last it became too much for her patience; she had been walking a few yards behind him all the while, and now they had reached a corner where two roads met—one led to Hengisthorne, the other to Ravensleigh, Reginald's home. So she turned off into the homeward road, just looking back to say over her shoulder—"Good-bye, Redgie! don't come over to schoolroom tea to-night, because you're too grumptious. I wish you had kept your promise. You promised not to mind what I said." Off she ran at a swinging trot, but presently compunction seized her, and following a sudden impulse, she turned sharply round and ran back again after him. She saw him striding on yards ahead of her.

"Redgie!" she panted out.

He turned.

"Redgie!" she gasped out breathlessly. "I *wish* I hadn't said that! I know it hurts to be told that one is good-for-nothing. I am *always* feeling so—and so I know what it is."

He laughed at her would-be comfort.

"And besides that," she added, "I am sorry because Dorothy is always telling me that I don't treat you with half enough respect."

Here Reginald's face softened very much, as he

answered: "*Respect,* Hessie? Who can respect where there's nothing worthy of respect?"

"Don't, *please,* say that," she cried, "or I shall hate myself still more,—besides I don't know that Dorothy meant that there *was* anything worthy of respect, except that I am so much younger than you are. I beg your pardon for everything."—This was said with such an air of grave penitence as she held out her hand, that Reginald, though little comforted by the explanation of Dorothy's meaning, burst out laughing, as he said, whilst he took the honest little hand in his—

"Come, Hess! You and I never have scenes like this; we are companions in misfortune; we are two vagabonds, and everybody else may rail at us as they like, but we don't care a bit, do we? for we just mean to enjoy ourselves."

Those great brown eyes were raised to his face once more with a look of inquiry in them, as she said: "Don't you care, Redgie? I think I do sometimes care very much what papa and mamma and Dorothy say, but then it all goes. And you think we need only enjoy ourselves? That is a great comfort: but I think I'll ask Dorothy. I'll say that you said so."

"Pray, don't ask her any such thing," he said hastily, "you'll find out as you go along. Run home now, or you will catch it from Violet for being late for tea."

"I think you are unjust to Vi," she replied, firing up. "Papa says——" here she pulled herself up short, conscious again of going wrong.

"At it again!" said Reginald, laughing. "Go on—I should like to hear it all."

"He says," resumed Hester unwillingly, "that a

man who is unjust is not worth much. But, dear Redge! I don't think he meant you! You have made me say such dreadful things this day—I wish you had let me stay indoors with my books!"

"Perhaps it would have been better for us both if you had stayed by the shores of the blue Danube," he said carelessly.

"It's no good making resolutions!" she cried impetuously, actual tears gathering in her eyes; "*you* make me break them. You tell me to do what every one else says is wrong—and then, when I do it, you are unkind!"

"Come, Hessie! We are not going to quarrel—you and I; I can only say that if we do, it will be your fault, not mine, for it takes two to make a quarrel, and *I* don't mean to do anything of the sort. I couldn't quarrel with the one little girl in all the world who ever makes me feel I might be better than I am."

"I hope you won't be better yet," she sighed, "because then you would be telling me what I ought to do, like everybody else. I know I shan't like you half so much when you're better."

"*When*, indeed!"

"*Never*, I hope," she said emphatically, "because then you will be leaving me ever so far behind. Ever so far, because I shall be a vagabond all my life."

"That day is a very long way off, Hess," he replied, shouldering his fishing-tackle once more. "And now I am going home to my little mother, and you must run home too, as fast as you can, for it's very nearly five o'clock."

"But you are coming back with me?" she said, much dismayed at what she thought her words had done. "You must come back, Redge! They will all expect you."

"Not they," was his reply, as he turned on his heel and walked off down the road; whilst she reluctantly turned away and wandered slowly back between the gorse-hedges, until she turned in at the open gate that led her into the Hengisthorne shrubberies.

CHAPTER II.

THE MOLLUSC STIRRED.

THERE was great stillness throughout the house; all the doors and windows were open, except the study, where Hester had sat that morning. Evidently not only the elders were out, but the little ones also, who have a happy knack always of making themselves heard from the top of the house to the bottom.

Pushing the study door open, Hester discovered Violet curled up in a large arm-chair, fast asleep. At sight of her, even Hester's hasty, headlong movements were checked, and she stood motionless for a moment, hesitating as to what to do next.

The window was still open, and that thrush was still singing, perhaps not quite so rapturously because a little sleepily; golden tassels from the laburnum dipped down and up again before the window; it was a low window, latticed, with shrubs and trees close up to it, through which ran a narrow path communicating with the carriage-drive. Delicious spring evening scents came into the room on the outer air, but Hester's nose was insensible to such delicate scents as yet, being a young and vigorous and scarcely appreciative nose. What she appreciated far more was the tea-table spread

with snowy cloth, on which stood the brown bread,—the home-made buns—the country butter, fresh from their own dairy. All signs of the Danube had been swept away. She turned her eyes once more upon the sleeping figure by the fireside, for fires were necessary, although windows were open. Certainly it *was* a very small figure, but the face was more than a year in advance of Hester; a sallow face—although there was a flush on the cheeks now from sleep; the dark, almost black, hair—short and thick like Hester's—fell in waves about her low, broad forehead, the eyebrows were also dark and very fine, and the lashes on her cheeks long and thick. Hester felt remorseful: here was Violet asleep at five o'clock in the afternoon, showing thereby that she was not yet quite herself; all alone too. The others had no doubt gone out driving, and probably they had expected Hester to be back long ago; and there had she been enjoying herself with Reginald all day, and after all, when they parted she did not feel as if it had been nearly such a nice day as she had meant it to be—owing to her own clumsiness, she told herself. A coal dropped in the grate, and Hester's boots creaked as she advanced on tiptoe to the table. Violet woke up. Rubbing her eyes, and staring all round her, as she sat forward in her chair, she exclaimed: "Hessie! you have come in, then? Is it tea-time?" she asked, yawning and stretching herself; "I suppose I went to sleep after the tea came in; where have you been all day?"

Hester dashed off hat and jacket, as she laughed and said: "I should just think you were asleep, Vi! Sound as a top! I have been in the room one whole five

minutes. Your head doesn't ache now, does it? That's all right; and now we can be jolly and cosy. I've been down to the Alder stream with Redge all day. He caught lots of trout; he wouldn't come back with me. To-morrow you and I will have a day of it. You'll be all right then, won't you? We'll go down to Angel Chine, and we'll come back by the sands." Hester was the leader generally, though Violet, being the elder, poured out the tea; but it was Violet who yielded in most things, for Hester's was the strongest influence. Here the sound of feet and voices announced an arrival, and presently the study door opened to admit their father and mother and Dorothy. Mr. Tracy—a magistrate in one of the London Police Courts—was enjoying a month's holiday at his country house at Wearmouth; his wife was a sweet and gentle lady, with very little power either mental or physical. Dorothy was the strength and sunshine of the house. Schoolroom tea was an institution for the elders as well as for the younger members. The entrance of those elders was the signal for a rapid survey of the state of the tea-pot and the ratio of cake to each; not that Violet and Hester were greedy by any means, but, as they freely told the ruthless diners, "they did wish that they would bring their own cake with them."

"Buns! veritable buns!" exclaimed Mr. Tracy, rubbing his hands gleefully; "that drive from Parkborne has sharpened our appetites marvellously, hasn't it, Do? Well, runaway! and what have you and Vi been doing with yourselves?"

"I didn't come in till after five o'clock," said Hester.

"O papa! *not* a whole one! you won't eat any dinner." (This last was said in parenthesis to her father, who was making an onslaught on the buns.)

"And poor Vi all alone for the whole afternoon!" said the mother, somewhat reproachfully; "you might have thought a little, dear Hessie."

"Hessie never thinks, my dear," resumed the father; "we ought to know that by this time. She and Reginald, when once they get together, banish thought. Eh, Hess! And to what did that energetic, hard-working young man devote the day?"

"Papa, it is too bad of you," began Hester, setting down her tea-cup with considerable violence.

"I quite agree with you, Hess: it *is* too bad that a young fellow of his parts should so fribble away his time."

"He did not 'fribble' to-day at all," protested Hester; "he caught trout."

"Excellent! Most praiseworthy! Highly to his credit! Another cup of tea, please, Violet."

"I'm very glad he *didn't* come back with me, then," went on indignant Hester, whilst Dorothy, accustomed to their father's satire on this subject, asked, as she gathered up her cloak and gloves—

"Why didn't he?"

"Because I preached to him rather, and he thought he shouldn't like any more," said Hester stoutly. Here there was a general and irrepressible laugh at the very idea of poor Hester trying to turn Mentor. In fact, Mr. Tracy laughed so much that the others left off in compassion for Hester, who slid from her chair with glowing cheeks, and, perching herself on her father's

knee with a hand on each shoulder, looked straight into his face, as she said—

"Papa, don't! I wish you wouldn't!"

"Wouldn't what?"

"Wouldn't——*everything;* and I do wish you wouldn't speak so of Redge—and yet you always say you're so fond of him?"

Mr. Tracy bent his head to kiss the hand that rested on his buttonhole, and all the satire and laughter had gone out of his tone when he said—

"My love, it is just because I am fond of him and always have been, and always shall be—although he is no longer a ward of mine, but free to do and be what he likes—that I desire so much to see a backbone to the boy."

Violet and Hester opened their eyes.

"I do not mean that his organisation is incomplete, but that he is lacking in the sort of backbone which is only developed by doing the right thing, instead of always doing the thing that is pleasant."

The mother and Dorothy had gone away to get ready for dinner, and the father was alone with his two young daughters.

"Girls need not have that sort of backbone, need they?" asked Hester earnestly.

"Every one," replied her father emphatically; "Violet's is growing rapidly," he added, smiling at the thoughtful face behind the tea-pot. "Dorothy's came to perfection so long ago that you would scarcely call it backbone, for it is the whole framework of her—there is the same sunshine about what she does not like as about what she likes; but this sort of organisation is rare."

"And mine?" asked Hester doubtfully.

"Yours?" repeated her father, pinching her cheek. "Ah! you are one of the mollusc tribe. There goes the first dinner-bell!"—He vanished, leaving Violet glowing beneath a sense of the great help which may be gathered from a few words of encouragement spoken by one we love;—leaving Hester singularly meditative.

"Mollusc! mollusc!" she repeated half to herself. "Vi, do you remember what we used to learn about *molluscs* in Gosse's *Natural History*, before we went to the High School?"

All that Violet could remember was that they were soft, but she thought there was a volume of Gosse on the book-shelves. Hester found it, turned to the index, looked up "Mollusc," and, referring to the page, evidently found nothing that pleased her; for she shut the book with a hasty snap, as she said with an aggrieved expression: "They only have something which 'answers to the brain of superior animals,' therefore they must be very inferior creatures."

Oysters were molluscs. What did the professor once tell them concerning the ancient Greeks and oysters? Did he not say that some clever old Greek believed in men becoming oysters? No! She was afraid it was *women* only, if they did not "live up;" so that, in other words, her own father had called her an oyster. Such was Hester's logic.

"Well!" she said out loud, with far more bitterness in her heart than in her tone, "if I begin by being an oyster at fourteen, who knows that I may not be something better by the time I am twenty—a lobster,

perhaps? Ah, wouldn't I give the professor a jolly nip with my claws then! Another evening, Vi, Mrs. Teague *must* send up more buns—have you had enough?"

Violet assured her that she had.

"Yes, of course you have, because you can always give up to other people. I can't; at least, not as if I did not mind it, as you can. I suppose that 's another sign that I 'm a mollusc."

"Hess, don't mind that; papa was only in fun."

"Mind it! I should think *you* would mind being told you were a flabby thing—one of the lowest of animals!" cried Hester, laughing; but Violet knew that laugh to be a laugh with a tear in it; and the poor oyster, casting about in her mind for something to do which looked like a duty, thought she had better go up to the nursery to the little ones, for they were often "cantankerous" at this time, when nurse was getting their baths ready.

The little ones were only two in number, Patrick and Katherine—called Pat and Kitty, aged respectively seven and five years. Little they might be, but great was their influence. Perhaps it was the fact that two others, also boy and girl, who had come between Hester and Patrick, had died in scarlet fever, which made these little ones so much the darlings of their parents that they were like miniature king and queen in the house, whose rule was almost absolute.

Fortunately there was counteracting influence in the shape of a nurse with a will of iron, albeit her heart was as true as steel and as soft as wax; also Dorothy, Violet, and Hester were unanimous in protesting that

spoilt children were sure to grow up tyrants, and where there was tyranny in a house, there could be no freedom, and where there was no freedom, no good thing could flourish.

Up to the kingdom of these two petty tyrants went Hester after tea, leaving Violet once more in her arm-chair, and absorbed in *John Halifax, Gentleman.* That nursery was certainly one of the best rooms in the house. You went up a slippery oak staircase from the matted hall, then down a passage, at the end of which you turned into a large and lofty room with a charming window and a still more charming window-seat; and sitting or kneeling there, according to your age and size, you could see over the garden, then across the wide moorland, and over belts of pine-trees, until your eye reached a line that never varied, except in light and shade—a line that told of the grand old ocean being there. The children might have been New World explorers, for the intent interest they were evidently taking in that blue line on this particular evening. Both were kneeling side by side on the window-seat, elbows on the sill, and cheeks between their hands; their backs were to the door, and they did not hear Hester as she entered the room.

"Well, Kitty! and then?" the boy was saying eagerly.

"And *then,*" said the little sister, with the manner of a small oracle, "then the boat went a long, long way, up into the sky, just there, Pat; do you see that wee red cloud? that's what the boat was *chainsed* into, and then all the wind went away, and it was a beautiful day, it was!"

"But where did the poor man go to, the fisherman?" asked Pat.

"You stoopid boy, with his boat of course, up into the sky!" said the *improvisatore* somewhat impatiently.

"It's a stupid story, rather, I think," said Pat discontentedly.

"It was *quite* true, it was," maintained Kitty oracularly. "Nurse did tell me that fishermen go out on the sea and never come home."

"Ay! and that's what they'll do to-night, poor fellows, many of them! for there's an awful storm coming up," said nurse, at that moment bustling into the room with two little clean night-gowns and a large can of hot water, whilst Hester sat herself down on the window-seat facing them both. With a simultaneous spring, Pat was on her back and Kitty on her lap, and a ride to London was insisted upon and agreed to.

"Come off, you children! Miss Hester, they're too much for you! How often must I tell you, Master Patrick, that you are not to jump on your sisters' backs?"

"Never mind, Hannah," said Hester breathlessly, as she careered round the room, one child in front and the other behind; "it won't hurt, it's good for one's backbone."

"Gee-up!" shouted Patrick at these encouraging words, ignoring Hannah in the triumph of the moment, as he pummelled into his willing horse with his knees, whilst Kitty nearly throttled her at the same time; but nurse had no idea of ignoring Pat, whatever he might mean to do in that line with her. With her strong arm she dragged him off his sister's shoulders, saying: "Miss Hester, you'll repent this one day."

But Hester only laughed, and Pat, half whimpering, as he obeyed orders by beginning to undress himself, said: "Why, Redge gave me pigaback all over the garden this morning."

"Mr. Reginald is a man, and he has a strong back. You must remember that," replied his nurse sharply.

"And yet he has no backbone; poor Redge!" thought Hester, as she seated herself at last, panting, on the window-seat; and little Kitty, tired and sleepy, on her lap, was quiet and meditative too, for a wonder.

"They say there's to be an awful storm to-night," said Hannah. "When me and the children were out this afternoon, we met a man who had come up from the shore, and he said that the fishing-boats hadn't come in at all, and that there wasn't a sign of them, and he didn't think they ever would come in if the south-west gale was coming up. Think of the widows and orphans, Miss Hester!"

"It's not much use my thinking of them," replied Hester, "when I can't do anything to help them—what's the good?"

"There! do you hear that?—that's a dreadful sweep of wind," shuddered nurse, as she dashed the water into the bath. "We never hear it so in London; and that's what I always say of this place—it's one of the wildest! And storms, like to-night's will be, makes heavy hearts, and I'm sure there's care enough in the world! Miss Kitty, you're getting sleepy, my dearie, jump up now, and say your prayers before you get sleepier; then I'll undress you."

Nothing would do but she must kneel down on the window-seat by Hester, and say her little prayers there

looking out westward, only her eyes were screwed up tightly, as though there were some special virtue in not allowing them to open. When she came to the end of the Lord's Prayer, she opened her eyes very wide, however, and looking at Hester, said gravely: "Keep *still*, Hessie; Dorofrey always does keep still when I say my prayers." Once more the eyes were tightly closed, and she resumed in a louder tone: "Please God, bless papa and mamma, and sisters, and all my friends." Then she paused, but in a minute went on: "And please bless Redgie, 'cos he gave me that ride, and please make his back always strong, and Hessie's too. *Ah*—men." There was prolonged emphasis on the *Ah*.

Something welled into Hester's eyes as she put down her little sister with a kiss, whilst nurse said in a low tone: "She *is* such a child for putting in bits of her own;" and Hester, not usually given to meditation, went away downstairs deep in thought, and all the happier for that little bit of Kitty's own; there might be some hope for molluscs then, after all.

"O Hess! I *am* glad you have come!" cried out Violet from the fireside in the schoolroom, where she was still sitting in the arm-chair with Miss Mulock's book of books still in her hand. "It wasn't worth while to have the lamp, and it's been getting darker and darker, and the wind has been getting higher and higher!—it always makes such a moaning and howling and whistling in this chimney—till at last, do you know, I was frightened to move, and I've been sitting here longing for you, and hearing all sorts of voices. It sounded just as if people were groaning and crying and sighing. I always hear all that in the wind."

"You goose!" was Hester's unsympathetic answer; but sympathetic was the hand that at the same time grasped her sister's thin and nervous one as she said: "Come along upstairs and dress—what *are* you starting at? That was only the laburnum against the window outside. I say, that is a gust!"—for just then, as they were mounting the stairs, a gale of wind that rattled all the windows in the house, and then died away with a wail, made the one girl shrink again close up to the other one who delighted in it, and said that it made her think of "all sorts of jolly things."

CHAPTER III.

STORMY WEATHER.

NOT so very far from Hengisthorne was the coast, and it was a coast of Chines, where the gorse bloomed down to the sea, and the fir-cones fell, or blew, into the waves. White horses were riding in to-night; the grey haze, which had suited the fisherman so well and the trout so ill, had foreboded a threatened disturbance, and the disturbance meant a frightful gale and blinding rain. There was a cottage in Angel Chine, sheltered by the cliff from the west wind certainly, but it had to bear the full force of the southerly blast as it swept off the sea and rushed up the pass between the cliffs. What a night that was for those who waited and watched! In the cottage there were two who waited, mother and son; they were waiting for the fishing-boats that had gone out that morning in the fair spring sunshine. The mother's face in the window every now and then, looking across the waste of waters, was the same face as that by the fireside; and from her and her people *he* got the lithe straight figure, the blue-grey eyes, the red-brown skin, and the blue-black hair. "But where the lad got his fancy from—who could tell?" his mother was wont to say.

"I can hear it now," he cried, starting up from the wooden elbow-chair; "that's the third time to-night!" And for the twentieth time that evening he opened the door, and, closing it gently behind, stood out there bare-headed, listening.

Above him was blackness, in front of him was blackness, save the snow-white horses that came riding in wildly, breaking with a loud thundering roar, then drawing back again with almost the shriek of a creature in pain, to be drowned the next moment in another crash of waters thundering on the shore. And all around the wind was raging so pitilessly that it sounded for all the world like some huge caldron boiling; the only quiet thing was that lad as he stood there, listening.

"I heard it, I know I did," he muttered. The door opened and shut, and his mother stood beside him; he threw his strong right arm around her, and held her steady, whilst he said—

"It's not fit for thee"—that "thee" meant so much between those two. "I've heard it three times," he went on, "and it's like God's voice; it's like God singing, more than ever to-night! I tell thee there is never a storm without it, to me, and I wish thou couldst hear it too!"

"This Chine was always one for the angel-harps, my boy," said his mother soothingly, for the boy was excited now.

"But it's *more* than angel-harps; they wouldn't bring help and hope like *this;* what I hear is a strong, grand, pitiful voice, and I hear it always when father's storm-stayed; and always when I've been fretting

because I can't get more book-learning or books, that voice speaks to me then; '*Wait*,' it says then—'Trust,' it says now."

"Wait, and trust; and then, will the boat come back; Joss?" sighed the poor woman, leaning like a beaten thing on the strong support of her young son's courage. Well was it for her that she could not see his face as she uttered those words—his face with the sharp sudden quiver of pain across it, as his heart went out over the sea to the father whom he loved.

"Wait and trust," he said softly, leading her back again into the cottage, "and we know God is good."

. . . . . .

In the drawing-room that evening, "curtained and close and warm," there were no signs of a storm without. A soft red glow was diffused throughout the room by the large rose-coloured shade over the duplex-lamp. A heavy curtain was drawn across the bow-window, another one over the door. At one side of the cheerful hearth, where fir-cones crackled, sat Mr. Tracy pretending to read, but often putting his paper down and glancing over his glasses with an air of fond interest at the group round a table on the other side of the room, and as often looking at his wife, the very picture of dreaming unconsciousness, on a couch opposite to him. The group at the table consisted of his three daughters, of course, playing at a very favourite game of theirs, called "Snatching Patience." Cards are dealt round, faces downwards, until the whole pack is dealt; then, without the ceremony of waiting for turns, each ace as it comes is played out into the board, and the cards following, independently of suit or turn, are played out

as quickly as possible—ace, two, three, and so on to knave, queen, king; and the one who is first to play out all his cards is the conqueror. Dorothy enjoyed a game as heartily as the younger ones. She was nineteen, but she was no elder sister in *standing upon her rights*—only elder through her happy influence. A pretty group they made: two in pale blue cashmere, and one in black grenadine and white lace, against a background of mouse-coloured velveteen window-curtains, and the rosy lamp-light tinting all.

"I back Hess to win," exclaimed Mr. Tracy, at last leaving his chair and coming to stand by their table. "I back Hess in any game. Violet is too considerate of her adversaries, and Dorothy is always a goose in laughing too much." Even as he spoke Dorothy was leaning back helplessly in her chair, laughing uncontrollably, as she allowed Hester to "come in at a rattling gallop," as her father said, and play out her last card. "Good heavens! what a night it is!" broke off Mr. Tracy suddenly, as the wind swept round the house, howling, moaning, and whistling, whilst trees creaked and groaned, branches snapped, and creepers tapped against the window. "What a night some must be having at sea!"

"And some on shore, too—the wives and mothers!" said gentle Dorothy, as she gathered up the cards and put them away.

"But we are so cosy in here," said Hester, "and we can't help them, can we? So what's the use of thinking about them?" And she pirouetted round the room, arriving at last in front of her father, who had once more settled himself in his chair.

"That remark is worthy of Reginald," he observed. "Evil communications corrupt good manners—eh, Hess? You spoke without thinking, and it *is* of use to think."

"Papa," began Hester, "Reginald would put up a lighthouse to-morrow if he could, and if it would help any poor people out at sea."

"I dare say he would, my dear girl, *to-morrow*," replied her father coolly, "but how would that help the ships that are wrecked to-night?" Hester gave a little stamp, and disappeared behind the curtain into the window recess. Perhaps the storm outside calmed her ruffled heart, for she soon emerged and made for her father's side, having every intention of seating herself on his footstool; but the rug happened to be a white bear-skin with an objectionably prominent head, over which she fell prostrate into her father's arms. There he held her, in a somewhat undignified position.

"We are friends now, Hess of the awkward squad! Kiss and make it up," he whispered. "I don't like one of my children to speak as if she cared for nothing and nobody, so long as she is comfortable herself. I know she does not mean that; but then, I don't like her even to speak so."

Hester was silent, for a wonder.

Violet was arranging herself at the piano, in obedience to a sleepy request from her mother, to play her last new piece, and Dorothy was standing behind her to encourage her, for it was pain and grief to poor Violet to perform even before such a domestic audience. None of them but Dorothy knew the trial it was to her, nor how manfully she tried to combat such weak-

ness, and to nerve the trembling fingers to be strong to perform their part as sweetly as they could in the schoolroom. She always envied Hester the consummate assurance with which she would establish herself on the music-stool, and stolidly go through a piece without caring for any one, so long as it was done, generally winding up with a statement, after the finishing chords had been struck, to the effect that there was a page or two of variations which she had missed, or "some horrid black notes for the left hand were no good at all, so I didn't play them." Violet, on the contrary, always rose from the piano with a painful consciousness of how much better it might have been.

"Then will there really be many wrecks to-night, papa, do you think?" asked Hester from the stool at his feet.

"I am afraid so. They were looking out for the fishing-boats this afternoon when we were down at the Chine," he replied; "they were due at one o'clock—it was then nearly four. There were anxious telescopes up, and anxious shakes of the head."

"Then it would really be a very great thing if they had a lighthouse above that Chine, wouldn't it?"

"Not above the Chine, but out on the Bear Rock—that's where they want it; but people are a long time thinking of these things, and many lives are sacrificed first before the authorities think it necessary to do anything." Hester thought of that lighthouse for a strangely long time; it was not usual with her that the same subject should engross her thoughts for many minutes together. She thought of it through Violet's shaky little piece; she thought of it through a game

of bézique with her, whilst the others were sipping tea; she thought of it after they went to bed. Indeed, so wonderfully silent was she whilst she and Violet were undressing, that Violet said at last: "Hess! what *are* you thinking of?"

Hester paused a moment, then she replied gravely: "I'm thinking of backbones—and lighthouses."

Violet was too sleepy to attempt to see any possible connection between the two. But long after she had turned round on her pillow and gone into dreamland Hester was still standing in the window, wrapped in her flannel dressing-gown, with the blind pulled up, as she looked out into the black night, listening to the shrieking wind that rattled the outside green shutters, and "swished" the trees as if they were mere nothings; trying her utmost to put herself outside, there, in the very middle of it all—of all that seething world of wind and waves; imagining at last that she could really see the white foam-line beyond those furthest black pine-trees.

"Yes, if I were often to do this," she thought, "I should always feel miserable on a stormy night. I should almost hate getting into my own snug bed; and so this will be one way of getting my backbone to grow, perhaps, because I shall be beginning to *think* then. Papa does not know how dreadful it is to be looked upon as a soft, flabby thing!—and, best of all, if I get a backbone, I shall be able to show dear old Redge how to do it. I shouldn't mind having to be a mollusc for some time longer if only I could help him to get out of it, and to hear papa say, in his dear old way, 'Come! that is something like!—there's some stuff in the lad

after all, and he's got out of the mollusc stage, and has grown a backbone!'—Now, if he would *only* build that lighthouse! I wonder if he could?—if it would take much money? I am quite sure he would not like the trouble of doing it; and so, if he did, it would be doing something he does not like because he *ought*, and that's the beginning of backbone, papa says. How funny it all is!" With this Hester let down the Venetian blind with a terrific crash, and jumped into bed, making Violet imagine in her dreams that there was a sudden end of all things, as she woke with a start, and cried out to "Hessie," who had just tucked herself snugly into her own little bed, out of which she jumped again instantaneously, and did what she knew Violet wanted —got into her bed with her; very close quarters, but that Violet did not mind, as she liked to feel the clasp of those sturdy strong arms.

There followed some days of rough weather; incessant wind and incessant rain kept every one indoors, except those who were forced by stern necessity to go out, and those like Mr. Tracy, who went out whatever the weather was, and would come back in a dripping mackintosh after a ten-mile walk, fresh and vigorous, and, popping his head round the drawing-room door, would say to his wife: "My dear, let the girls have a run, it will do them good!"

But Mrs. Tracy's gentle word was law in matters of health. Dorothy went out in all weathers—she had school and poor people to visit; but Hester and Violet and the two little ones were under a stricter home rule with regard to weather. So indoor games and indoor pursuits had to be taken up zealously, which

is not always an easy matter when people go down to the country prepared for real spring weather and tennis.

Suppose we take a sample-day out of those rough days which followed upon that lovely spring morning.

The prayer-bell rang punctually at a quarter past eight, and it was the invariable signal for a war-whoop and a war-dance from the nursery, with a precipitate rush to the top of the stairs, or rather a tendency that way, checked however by a following rush from nurse, long of limb and swift of foot, who usually arrested the culprits like any constable on the verge of a helter-skelter flight downstairs with these words, given in a tone of command, "Master Patrick! Miss Katherine! gently and quietly, if *you please!*" This always had the immediate effect of sending them into the dining-room hand-in-hand, as quiet as mice. At breakfast they sat one on each side of their mother, and it was Hester's fate to be on the other side of Pat, and thereby she ran the risk of his little sticky fingers being constantly laid upon hers, or of her elbow being roguishly tipped just as she was raising her cup to her lips. But breakfast was usually a quiet and rather silent meal, because Mrs. Tracy so often came down with a headache that her husband used to enforce calm and quietness, especially upon the two little ones.

On this particular morning Patrick's feelings got the better of him; after eating all his porridge, he let his spoon clatter down into his basin, as he looked out of the window with wide-open blue eyes and raised eye-brows, and exclaimed: "Horrid, *beastly* wet morning! we shall have to be indoors all day, I s'pose!"

There was an explosive "hush" from Hester, whilst his father said—

"Pat! you were told last night not to say 'beastly.'"

"Redge says it," muttered the little fellow; upon which Hester, hastening to the rescue, said—

"Redge is a man, Pat, so he may say anything."

"Then I wish I was a man!" was the retort, "I'll say all the words I like then!"

Telegraphic looks, which meant volumes, made poor Hester feel that she had, as usual, said the wrong thing; and her father could not resist saying—

"Most admirable doctrine on your part, Hess, I must say!"

It was said with a good-natured smile, but Hester felt considerably more rebuked than the impish Pat. Violet came down consistently late, and was never remonstrated with on the subject, because she was delicate. Dorothy apparently got no breakfast at all until other people had nearly done, for the porridge-eaters required frequent attendance.

"My feeder's come untied!" one would cry, as she took her place at the table; "No! Dorofrey must do it, not you, Hess;" or, "Dorofrey! here's one of those nasty black things in my porridge. I won't trouble *you*, mother; and I don't want *you*, Hess—only Dorofrey. It's such a big black thing!"

Then there would be a buttering of toast for them; the division of a slice into fingers and thumb possessing an unfailing charm. And then, might they have an egg? Of course they might, and only Dorothy could take off the shell to their satisfaction.

In addition to all this she would never let her father

carve at the side-board, but always insisted upon doing it herself, and so dexterously that he would say ham did not taste the same when any one but Dorothy cut it. And her mother's coffee was rarely quite as she liked it; she used generally to fancy it more if Dorothy would boil up the milk afresh in the little copper saucepan which stood on the dining-room hearth all breakfast-time.

And Dorothy used to do all this so beautifully, because she made a pleasure of it; never a trouble or a burden was anything that she could do for others, more especially for those dear home "others."

Sometimes her father would say: "My dear love; do come and sit down to your own breakfast now."

Or her mother would expostulate: "Dorothy, dear! now, *don't!*" but, as Hester told her mother, they all knew that meant, "*do.*"

Mr. Tracy was glancing over the local newspaper, and he exclaimed suddenly—

"Ah! just what we feared! every one of the fishing-boats but one went down in that gale the other night. It is supposed that the rocks off the Bear Rock had something to do with the wreck; probably, and always will until they have a lighthouse there. There will be trouble indeed down amongst the fishing-huts."—And he pushed his chair away, and walked straight out of the room, being one of those people who, in spite of sharp sarcastic words at times, have a heart as "big as a house," as the saying is.

Again Hester thought of backbones and lighthouses, and wished that Reginald had been there at that moment to see such a man as her father so stirred; she

felt as if surely it would have stirred Reginald himself into erecting a lighthouse at once. She knew he had more money at his command than her father had, for she had often heard him say that his mother paid all his expenses except his cigars and tobacco.

When Mr. Tracy left the dining-room, it was a signal for the after-breakfast day to begin. Mrs. Tracy gave up all housekeeping to Dorothy whilst they were at Hengisthorne; and Dorothy, who had been taking cookery lessons at South Kensington, was not a little proud of the praise now bestowed upon her for clever management and nice suggestions. So off she went with her keys, whilst her mother and the children retired to the morning-room, where the large couch was speedily transformed into the express train for London. Violet and Hester, ruminating in the dining-room window, making charming plans for expeditions "when the rain left off," were rudely broken in upon by guard and engine-driver.

"Come to London, *bofe* of you!"

"No, Kitty, we can't," said Hester decidedly.

"Train 's off! ladies and gentlemen take your seats!" shrieked guard Patrick, leaping upon Violet, who meekly submitted, protesting at the same time that the journey was not to be a long one.

"Do come, dear girls!" cried Mrs. Tracy gently, "they have been making it all so cleverly, and I am sure it looks most comfortable." A difference of opinion might have existed upon that point. The two unwilling passengers were thrust between two large cushions and the end of the couch, and told to lie down as the roof was coming, which was an open sheet of the *Times* newspaper. To please their mother they

submitted, but from speedy suffocation their father delivered them, happening to come into the room for that very piece of the paper, to which he wanted to refer.

"Vi and Hess are going to London!" shouted Pat between the intervals of a shrieking whistle performed by Kitty.

"Charming journey!" observed the father; "but I must unroof the carriage," which was made the pretext for arriving at the station, and a hasty withdrawal on the part of Violet and Hester.

"Play with them a little longer, won't you?" urged their mother; "it is so nice for them."

"We are going out to feed the rabbits, mamma," began Hester.

"Not in this weather, my love! Just look out of the window."

Hester did look, and saw floods of rain and branches tossing helplessly in the wind. Everything said plainly, "Make the best of things indoors."

Just then Kitty shrieked, "*Junkson!*" and rushed down upon her elder sisters, as they stood looking vaguely and hopelessly from the window for one streak, however faint, of clear sky between the clouds, but in vain! It was all one uniform sheet of leaden grey.

"*Junkson!*" again screamed Kitty; "into a train again you must go—*bofe* of you."

Once more Mrs. Tracy, laughing, implored the elders to submit to their youngers; once more Hester and Violet did unwilling duty as passengers; and how long that compulsory railway journey might have lasted

would be impossible to say, had not nurse appeared with a summons to the nursery as the clock struck ten. Then Dorothy came in with her housekeeping books, and Hester and Violet once more hung about disconsolate, as if they had got no work to do; at least Violet did, she being one of those much to be pitied people who are affected by weather. So we are all of us, more or less. Who would not feel brighter and braver on a clear, sunshiny day, than on a day of fog or pitiless downpour? But she was *receptive*—i.e. *capable of taking in*—to a further extent than should be, for her own comfort, which made her a very sympathetic character, but not one of much force. Now Dorothy not only *took in*, but she *gave out* largely at the same time; whilst Hester, as yet, made her own mark far more impressively than she received that of others. Therefore she was not lachrymose and grey-looking like the day at all; she was only ramping and stamping about the room like an impatient pony.

At last she stamped out of the room, stirred by a sudden thought. Upstairs she skipped, into the passage, and on until she reached a door, which led up a narrow flight of stairs or ladder into a little loft, wherein was no window—only a trap-door. From this trap-door she and Violet used often to get out on the roof in the summer evenings, and then they could see —oh, such a stretch of country! As she pushed the trap-door back when she had climbed up the ladder, the door behind her shut with a tremendous bang, for of course the wind came in with a rush, almost taking away her breath. So frightful was it in its violence, that even Hester was prudent for once, and thought it

might be advisable not to go outside; so she contented herself with kneeling upon the top step. They called it their "lookout," but it was not a cheerful one this morning.

She looked down upon the tops of trees through which the wind was crashing with terrific force, twisting and twirling them, and wrenching off their branches mercilessly. She saw moorland and heath; she could see the very walk she had taken with Reginald that day; she could see the chimneys of his mother's house peering out of the distant trees like little dovecots, and the slopes of park-land surrounding that house. And she could see, best of all!—what she had really gone up there for—a grand, broad stretch of ocean; no mere strip or line, but a mass of tumbling waters. She could see the breakers and she could see the ships; and again the wild pity she had felt that night when she stood in her window welled up within her, and what her father had said this morning came into her mind, about the fishing-boats all being lost, and the sorrow and suffering there would be; and words rose involuntarily to her lips, "They that go down to the sea in ships." And were they not out there before her, the ships and the men on board, doing their work out on that wild sea at the risk of being all drowned? She knelt there on that top step, thinking for a marvellously long time, considering that she was generally looked upon as a thoughtless individual.

There goes a tall figure along the carriage-drive; at least it looks diminutive from her point of observation, but she knows it to be tall—that figure in an ulster—because it is her father, starting upon a five hours'

walk, with one dry biscuit in his pocket. She hallooed loudly, but of course her insignificant voice was picked up by the wind and blown down the nearest chimney, which was the nursery, causing the nurse to say that she heard "a h-owl"—meaning an owl. Then Hester waved her handkerchief, and the ruthless wind caught hold of that also, and carried it right away out of sight. She was rather sorry for that, because it was one of the few pocket-handkerchiefs without ink-stains or sundry cuts.

A little figure went along the carriage-drive after her father, waterproofed against all weathers, and with a basket on her arm; it was Dorothy, going out to see some of her poorer brethren in the village. Then Hester bethought her of battledore and shuttlecock; and so she slipped down the ladder to go and find Violet, leaving the trap-door wide open. She and Violet could beat any one at battledore; one thousand was an average score for them.

"You have been on the roof, Hess," said Violet, looking at her sister's scarlet cheeks and tousled hair.

"I know I have; what of that?" asked Hester, giving the shuttlecock a skilful touch, which saved it from the banisters.

"You might have told me, and I would have come too," said Violet, a little reproachfully.

"The wind would have blown you to pieces; and besides, I went up there for a purpose. Go on, Vi! Well saved; 101, 102, 103—that's it."

"What purpose? O Hess! look out—114, 115, saved!" Both girls laughed so much that it was fatal

to their game, and the shuttlecock, wavering and staggering in its steady course, eventually came down before 200 had been reached.

"There!" cried Hester, hitting herself with her battledore, "that's me; that's my fate."

"What nonsense, Hess! what do you mean?"

"It's not nonsense, it's sober earnest. You know, I went up to our 'lookout.' I went up there to meditate, as the old Easterns did on their housetops. Don't laugh at me, Vi; any one would think I didn't know how to meditate, but I *do*. I went up certainly to look at this beloved country, but I went up to think about work as well, and all that father is always saying about it; and just as I was thinking, father himself went along the drive, and I made a signal-flag of my pocket-handkerchief, and it flew away over the sea, very likely to a sea-gull's nest; and then I came down from my perch to battledore and shuttlecock, and I said to myself, 'If I can keep up to one thousand at the first go, I shall do it.'"

"Do what?"

"Do everything better than I have done it yet; but *down* I came before two hundred. That shuttlecock's *me*, Vi, I tell you, and I'll make my mark on it at once."

Sharply Hester plucked out a feather on each side, saying: "There! you stupid little thing; perhaps you'll fly with more weight now. Come on, Vi! we'll do four thousand before dinner, only it won't be the same thing now as at first."

Not only a thousand times did the little shuttlecock fly from battledore to battledore. It had just reached

one thousand and ninety-six when a huge object came flying over the banisters and beat it down to the ground. There it lay, crushed, before attaining its destined goal, by one of the nursery pillows.

Both girls looked up; a small pair of black legs was descried between the banisters, scampering upstairs.

"That's Pat!" and without another word Hester bounded after him quick as lightning, three steps at a time. Down the long passage she saw those little legs go, in at the loft door, which slammed in her face; then a thought—a terrible thought struck her. She had left the trap-door open; ten chances to one the little fellow, who did not know danger, would rush straight up the ladder and on to the roof; he was light as a feather, and *she* knew what was the force of the wind up there this morning. All this went through her mind in less than a moment. Violet had been following more leisurely to see the end of the chase, and never will she forget the face that Hester turned upon her.

"Vi!" she gasped, pointing at the door, "he's gone in there,—rushed in,—and I left the trap open! Go after him. I can't."

Hester stood against the wall, white and trembling. Violet, with no visible emotion, except a momentary clenching of her hands and compression of her lips, went quietly through the door. She saw nothing of him. Still more quietly she went up the steps. There he stood, in the gutter, leaning over the parapet as he peered down into a swallow's nest. She wished to avoid startling him, so she said very gently—

"Pat, dear, it's time to come in and wash your hands

for dinner. You'll be late if you don't come in directly."

He turned, and crawled up the roof at once and into her arms as she stood on the ladder; then, as she gripped firm hold of him, she pulled the trap-door to and bolted it. Down the ladder carefully and quietly she stepped, the young imp chuckling.

"Didn't I stop your shuttlecock for you! and Hess didn't know where I ran to, did she?"

Without a word she set him down, and he skipped away to the nursery; then the two sisters looked at one another, and Hester slipped her arm through Violet's, as they moved away together to their room.

"Vi, you are a brick! and I am a duffer. Something seemed to cramp me all over, and I *could* not have gone and done it alone as you did."

"I don't think I could have done it—*alone*," was all Violet's answer, with a deep colour rising into her sallow cheeks. It was her perfect self-possession at such a moment, when presence of mind was indispensable, that made Hester look upon Violet as a moral support ever after that day. She said that *she* had a blustering courage—the courage that makes mistakes; but where was that when compared with Violet's calm power of gathering up all her forces collectedly in an hour of need?

"It was nothing," said Violet; "don't say anything about it downstairs."

"Indeed, I shall tell them all," maintained Hester; "not now, perhaps, but sometime."

CHAPTER IV.

BOOKS AND TOFFEE.

THE bell clanged, and the two girls hurried away to join the others at the early dinner-table.

"I say! this is really too bad!" groaned Hester, looking out of the window as she took her place.

"Well for you that papa is not here!" said Dorothy, Mr. Tracy having instituted a law which demanded the fine of one penny for all complaints against the weather.

"But really, Do, when we have just come down here for the holidays——"

"Poor papa will get very wet, I'm afraid," interrupted Mrs. Tracy, "and he is sure not to come in till five o'clock, whatever the weather is."

"Yes, and then he will come into schoolroom tea so hungry. Please *do*, mamma, tell Mrs. Teague to send us up double the quantity of buns, or else—do make a law which will forbid late diners to take anything but bread and butter at schoolroom tea." But Mrs. Tracy's attention at this moment was distracted by seeing Violet turning over the meat on her plate helplessly, as if her knife and fork refused to serve for eating purposes.

"My dear Vi!" said her mother, "what is the matter?"

"Nothing, mamma; only it's boiled beef, and I can't bear it!"

"My dear, when I was your age, what I did not eat was always kept for my tea; I believe now that it was most unwholesome treatment, but I was forced to eat it then."

"When you were *my* age, mamma?" repeated Violet, more than doubtfully.

"Ah! well, no, to be sure I was a little younger. I was eleven or twelve—quite that."

Violet, conscious of being fifteen and a half, looked most reproachfully at her mother.

A diversion was created by Dorothy asking her mother if some soup might be made for one Mrs. Martin, whom she had been to see that morning, and who was ill with bronchitis. Certainly she should have some soup, but Mrs. Tracy was afraid there would be no one to take it that afternoon in such weather. Dorothy explained that she wished to take it herself.

"Not in this rain, love—I could not think of allowing it. Once is enough in such weather."

"But it may clear by tea-time," suggested Dorothy the hopeful, who had a way of seeing sunshine where other people could only see cloud.

"Why doesn't that fat daughter of hers make her some soup?" asked Hester.

"Because they have nothing to make it of. They have had no meat in the house for a fortnight," replied Dorothy. "They have not been able to afford it."

At these words mighty efforts and convulsions went on at Violet's side of the table; the very thought of such starvation made her overcome her squeamishness.

"Remember, Hess!" broke in Pat suddenly, and somewhat irrelevantly, whilst Mrs. Tracy and Dorothy were discussing the best means of helping the poor Martins; and at the same time Kitty, on the other side, said—

"'Member, Hess! you pomised!" Each emphasised the warning with a tap from their spoons on Hester's knuckles, too temptingly displayed before them, as she played her last new piece on the table, whilst the pudding was coming.

"Mamma! I do wish they might have their dinner upstairs!" objected Hester, rubbing her injured knuckles with a rueful countenance.

"You p*om*ised to make some toffee!" emphatically repeated Kitty, as she brandished her spoon aloft, knowing how utterly vain was any appeal such as Hester's last words to her mother.

"Yes, but you two are not coming down to the schoolroom whilst we are making it," protested both Hester and Violet. "You shall see it as soon as it is ready to eat. If it clears up we shan't make it at all," she added, looking out once more in a would-be hopeful way.

Pat and Kitty also looked out, and chanted in chorus: "Rain! rain! go away! come again another day! But it *won't* go, it 's pouring *dreffly!*"

Indeed it did pour. Comfortable was it in the Hengisthorne home of comfort, where, if you were not able to go out and enjoy yourself, you could sit with

your mother in the luxurious "lounge," and stitch away at some pretty or useful needlework whilst she read aloud,—and make toffee in the schoolroom, and have all sorts of fun whilst doing it, barricading the door, which would not lock, against frequent onslaughts from the nursery, the attacking party being frequently cut off in their retreat by an enemy in the rear in the shape of nurse, who was "not going to stand them rampaging about in the hall when their ma was at home."

But there was no compensating comfort for the raging storm without down in that Chine cottage, where the shadow of death had fallen. One of all the fishing fleet had been spared to tell the tale of how all the others had been lost—gone away, some of them, without good-bye; and there was no hope now, for those who were left, of having even the satisfaction of gazing on the loved faces. All was blank silence. So Joss Compton was the only support of his mother.

"I can never let *thee* go out fishing, lad," she was saying to him as she sat by the hearth on that very afternoon when the weather was so much grumbled against up at Hengisthorne; "and thou hast never taken to it; thou hast hankered always after the larnin' more."

"That 's no good at all to feed us now," said the lad resolutely. "I must do something, mother. If you won't have me fish, I must get some land-work. There 's a gardener's lad wanted up at Mr. Treherne's."

It was a stern facing of facts that had to be faced at once. The very poor have no time to give themselves up to mourning; but with Joss the fact meant some-

thing more; it might mean the giving up of his cherished hours of study, as a luxury which must be sacrificed for real work that would pay. Hitherto he, the only child and darling of the fisherman and his wife, had been let off much of the work that would naturally fall to the lot of a fisherman's lad, for the sake of gratifying his love of books. That he might one day be a schoolmaster had been his grand dream; that he might know something more of music was a lesser dream. He had a violin—not a Straduarius or a Cremona, granted, but a decent one enough. It had belonged to his mother's father, and he and his instrument were like brothers. When he longed for books and for teaching that were beyond his reach, until the longing seemed almost too great to bear, then would he take his violin, and handle it and finger it, until the things it spoke to him would silence his yearnings and hush his impatience.

Now, on this pouring wet day, he had been looking at two things: the necessity for money to make a living for his mother, which meant hard work on his part, and good-bye to his books; not good-bye to his violin, but long silences most likely. He could not play this afternoon; he could not read: there was his mother's face before him—calm and pale and worn. Why should he not go up at once to Ravensleigh whilst his mother was sleeping, after a night of wakefulness and tears, and then and there ask to see Mr. Treherne, who had been out sea-fishing with Joss's father time after time, and might for *his* sake give the son a helping hand?

So the pilot-coat was pulled on over the blue jersey, and out he went into the howling wind and the drench-

ing rain, with his dead father's face before him, and his sleeping mother's; and the sacrifice of that grand dream of his seemed as nothing if only he might, ever so little, fill his father's place in working for that mother.

Ravensleigh was a mile away, up the Chine and over the moor; and, on such a day of rain, the boggy state of the ground seemed almost to double the distance. Mr. Treherne was deep in the newspaper at one end of a very large drawing-room that had windows and recesses in unexpected corners, so that his mother writing letters at her davenport in a remote recess did not hear the servant say to her son through the newspaper that "a young man, son of poor Compton, who was drowned," wanted to speak to him.

"Tell him to wait a minute," he said, without putting down the newspaper. Then, when the servant had retired, and the article had been read, Reginald rose, stretched himself, yawned, and went up to his mother's chair, and putting his hand on her shoulder, said—

"Mother, there's that poor fellow Compton's son come over to see me; you know Compton's boat went down with all the others that night. Subscriptions are being got up for the widows and orphans, but we should like to do something more for him and his mother, shouldn't we? Something specially for themselves."

"My dear boy, yes, certainly!" replied Mrs. Treherne, a comely, plump little lady, whose purse was always out on every occasion that her son demanded it. "Give him five pounds from me, and add what you like to it yourself; and if his mother wants work, tell him that I can always give her needlework."

The purse was put into Reginald's hands, and the

letter was resumed; people starve in such various ways, and people give their sympathy so variously.

Reginald went into the smoking-room and rang the bell. It had been the study in his father's lifetime, and the wall on one side was lined with books, the rest of the room being given up to pictures, and easy chairs and nicknacks.

"I am very sorry for you," began Reginald, as Joss was ushered in; "Mrs. Treherne and I are both very sorry for you; we know what your loss is, and we know that nothing we can do can make up for it; but then, you know, there is often a trouble that comes at the same time—that horrid money trouble—and so, if you will just let us help you—there;" and Reginald slipped a ten-pound note into the boy's hand, or rather he tried to do so; but Joss, colouring up to the roots of his hair, put both his hands behind him, as he answered hastily—

"It wasn't for that I came, sir; I've come up for work, if you'd let me help in the garden. Mother's afraid of the fishing now when it's rough. I heard your gardener wanted a boy."

"So he does, but that's no reason why you shouldn't take this for your mother. Tell her it's only a very slight acknowledgment of all your father taught me in boating and sea-fishing."

Joss took it then, and said—

"For my mother's sake, and thank you, sir;" but his eyes wandered, where they had gone on first entering the room, over the books. There was wealth indeed! He stood riveted; but he was so very wet, his clothes were actually dripping, and Reginald's sensitive nose was conscious of a fishy odour, as he said—

"Won't you go into the kitchen and dry yourself, and have some tea? I'll speak to Forbes about you, and then I'll let you know. Would you care for fourteen shillings a week and your dinner?" The eyes came down from the books, and a little absently he said "Yes," and thanked the lucky possessor of that store of riches, adding that he should take no harm from being wet, and that his mother would expect him back to tea. Ah, he thought, on his homeward dreary trudge over the bog again, if Mr. Treherne had only known his desperate hunger after the possession of but *one* half of *one* shelf of those books! But then, Reginald did *not* know; he never, or rarely, looked into one of them himself.

So the boy went home ten pounds richer than he was half an hour ago, and with the promise of some work, and yet with the craving for something so near, and at the same time so unattainable, stronger within him than when he had started; whilst Reginald, seeing a break in the clouds, told his mother he thought he should go over to Hengisthorne.

The toffee-makers had been having a glorious afternoon, in spite of rain and in spite of nursery-raids. Only those who know what it is to make home-made toffee can have any idea of the delights of it. Cooks object sometimes to giving out the ingredients, but then "Mrs. Teague was a darling," to quote Hester. Violet had grumbled at first that they might "just as well be in London—at home—if it comes to having to make toffee here at Hengisthorne. I think after all," she added, "I'd rather take *John Halifax*, and go and sit in the drawing-room with mamma and Dorothy."

"You are just not going to do anything so stupid," retorted Hester; "and here comes Martha with the things. Of course you must take your turn in stirring, and the one who stirs longest has the first taste, you know, always." The sight of the white table-cloth was inspiring, and when upon it were placed two plates, the bright saucepan, a large kitchen spoon, half a pound of butter, the basin of brown sugar, and a lemon, then Violet forgot *John Halifax* and the drawing-room, and went heart and soul, under Hester's leadership, into the toffee.

"Isn't it *lovely* to hear the butter frizzling?" cried Hester, standing with her head almost in the saucepan, as she stirred; "another dollop of sugar, Vi; that's it. Now, after one good stir about we'll squeeze the lemon. Oh! I say! it *is* roasting! I don't think I care at all about the first taste, if you do?"

Violet did not care either, if it must be bought at such a price, but she quietly took the spoon from Hester, and patiently stirred until her face was scorched crimson. Hester stood watching, and at last handed the glass of cold water, into which Violet let a large drop fall gently from the spoon, and then (joy of joys!) it congealed at once, and when Violet's fingers hastily took it out and broke it in two pieces, one for herself and one for Hester, it snapped like a piece of ice. No fear of it's not being sufficiently done. So it was poured out on the two plates, a smooth brown mass, and when it was a little cooled each girl took a plate, and proceeded with a knife to cut it into strips; and then again each strip was twisted into a stick, like barley-sugar.

"Talk of the delights of drawing-room afternoons! Why, Dorothy has nothing like this," protested Hester; "she would be afraid to sticky her fingers, much as she would like it, because of her crewel-work and in case of visitors. Look at *our* fingers!" four hands faced one another, shining in butter, brown with their work; "if school-days meant making toffee, and coming out meant *no* toffee, I think I would wait for years before I cared to come out!"

The twisting business was very soon over, and then the plates were sent away to some cool waiting-place in Mrs. Teague's regions; hands were washed, and Violet was going up to the nursery with a small stick for each waiting mite on the top of the nursery stairs, when she saw, from the staircase window, Reginald coming along the carriage-drive, upon which she sped back again to the schoolroom to tell Hester to have tea up in good time, if she were not down, for Reginald was coming. The schoolroom bell pealed, and the willing Martha was told to bring "an extra cup and saucer and the marmalade, because Mr. Treherne is coming in to tea," an order which she was accustomed often to hear at Hengisthorne and in London. Hester stood looking out of the window for a little while, grave and preoccupied; the bushes in the shrubbery were dripping with the rain that had now ceased, and birds were singing in anticipation of a rich banquet on the lawns. Thoughts were stirred by Reginald's coming—thoughts of the storm and of her night-watch, and of her new resolutions. She heard him step across the hall, and then she heard the drawing-room door shut.

She heard the children shrieking with laughter upstairs; evidently Violet was playing with them, and yet she wanted so much to read *John Halifax!* Things were beginning to assume unusual shapes in Hester's mind. Certainly, if she ever had fits of thought, those fits were more frequent at Hengisthorne than anywhere else. She saw more of her father—that was one reason; and she saw more of Reginald—that was another, for he so often irritated her father that she was constantly thinking how things might be made right between them. But now it was toasting-time, and she turned away to the table, and, spiking a piece of bread on the fork somewhat viciously, said: "Well, there are some very funny things, and some very difficult things, and if one could always laugh, everything would be much more jolly. *I* can almost always, but then those dreadful mistakes *will* come, and then I can't." Suddenly she was aware that half her light from the window was obscured, and looking round—for she was in the heat of her toasting—she saw her father watching her. In a moment the window was thrown open, and she was perched on the sill, with one arm round her father's neck, whilst the other was brandishing the toasting-fork aloft.

"Ugh! how wet you are."

"So would you be, my kitten, if you had walked fifteen miles in the rain, and such rain! And now I should like to go in and take off my wet boots if you will allow me. How long are you going to collar me here?"

"Only till you have promised me one thing," she said, nestling close up against the wet whiskers. "Reginald is here. You will be nice to him, won't you?"

"My dear, I am *always* nice." With which he disappeared; but Hester shook her head doubtfully as she returned to the fire, and the piece of toast began to smoke before she was well aware of what she was doing, so great was her trouble of mind. Just then the door opened, and Dorothy came in, followed by Reginald.

"O-o-oh! how cold and damp!" they both said, shuddering.

"No wonder, with the window open wide!" ejaculated Reginald, as he went up to it and shut it.

"My dear Hessie, what made you open the window upon the tea-pot, and leave the cosy at the side of it?" asked Dorothy.

Hester stood silent, with the burnt toast in her hand. Another mistake. Another link missing in the vertebral column!

"It's easy to see that the careful and methodical Violet has had nothing to do with tea this evening," observed Reginald good-humouredly. "Is this the way you make toast, Hess? Here; let me do it."

"It was because papa came up to the window, and I had something very particular to say to him," said Hester gravely. She glanced at the back of Reginald's head as he stood toasting, and she racked her brain to think of something really useful that he might be doing when Mr. Tracy should come into the room. A bright idea struck her; there was a drawing he had begun last time they were down at Hengisthorne. It was in the portfolio in the corner. If only he would take it up now, and go on with it, might not her father think, "There is some perseverance in the fellow after

all." She could get it all ready now. Violet had come down, and was fussing over the tea-tray. Dorothy and Reginald were talking in low tones over the toasting-fork. Now or never! Loyal Hester plunged at once into a portfolio standing in the corner against the bookcase, and ransacked its contents, until finally she dragged out a small block on which was a half-finished sepia sketch of Hengisthorne.

"There!" she exclaimed triumphantly. "I knew I should find it! Redge, do you remember this sketch? You began it last autumn. *Do* finish it now, won't you? Here are the paints, and here is a chair, and you can sit at this table in the window; and you can have your tea here nice and cosily by yourself." She had arranged it all. Of course, the others naturally stared in some surprise, whilst Reginald laughed, and said—

"Hester has not only developed a wonderful desire in herself for advancement in learning, but she is going to push others on in the same way. What in the world possessed you to hunt up this, Hess?" he added carelessly, taking it up. "Is it because you have laudably finished your course of the Danube?"

Stung by his words, she only answered shortly: "No, it *isn't*; because I *haven't*."

"Then," he went on, "it must be because you are sister of your eldest sister, and think with her that to take up a thing and let it drop—or rather, to take up nothing at all—is a crime, and that such a man should be turned out of good society."

Hester forgot her own little soreness then, and looked, first at Reginald, next at Dorothy. She saw

that there was a trouble in both faces, and a frown on Reginald's; not only that, but also a sarcasm in his tone, as he stood looking at his long-ago sketch. She addressed herself to the distribution of cups.

"Mamma's head aches," said Dorothy, "so she will have her tea in the drawing-room; I will take it to her."

"Let me!" and Reginald started forward.

"Thank you, I would rather take it; it might be too much trouble," replied Dorothy gravely, as she went away with it. Once more Hester raised her eyes to Reginald's face, and saw him turn away quickly, thereby coming face to face with Mr. Tracy, who at that moment burst into the room—dry, vigorous, happy.

"Ah! Reginald, you here? We thought you were too much engaged, perhaps, as we saw nothing of you yesterday. Thank you, my dear, I'll sit here"—close to the unlucky drawing. "Is this my tea, Vi? Thank you, my dear girl. Well, and how's your mother? Rough weather we have had lately, have we not? Clearing a little now; out in the west the clouds are lifting. There's a promise of better things, and that's always cheering, isn't it, Hess?"

"Hester looks as if she thought a promise not worth much," remarked Reginald, still smarting from Dorothy's words, and feeling as he always felt when within range of Mr. Tracy's clear eyes and high standard, "and I don't know that it is," he added, taking up the poker and stirring the fire.

"Certainly not, if there is no fulfilment," said Mr. Tracy quietly.

"Now we are coming to backbones again," thought Hester, inwardly groaning; "if I could only steer them away from them! Vi!" she said suddenly, "pass the marmalade to papa; he hasn't got any."

"I never take it, my dear. Certainly not, Redge, if there is no——"

"Where did you go, papa?" broke in Hester again, chafing at the repetition of the reproof. "You were out four hours—no, five!"

"Hester! it is very rude to interrupt. If there is no fulfilment, Reginald, of course a promise is worthless; but then we can all——"

"Redge!" in a loud whisper from the incorrigible Hester, as she patted the table encouragingly, where stood his cup and plate, "do come to your tea!"

But tea was far out of Reginald's thoughts as he stood leaning up against the chimney-piece, and looking straight out of the windows into the west, where there was a promise of better things, in the shape of lifting clouds and soft pale sky.

"We can all see to that ourselves, sir, you were going to say," he observed with nonchalance. "Well, yes! but then, you know, there is a wonderful charm in taking things easily."

Was he bent on aggravating her father, thought Hester, after having evidently aggravated Dorothy so much that she had not yet reappeared on the scene? Here she came, and the sight of her sweet, bright face actually made the tiresome fellow go on. "There is so very little worth grinding for, pleasure is so easily got."

"Redge! you really are foolish this afternoon,"

then said Dorothy, almost angrily, and her face flushed as she seated herself far away from him, in the rocking-chair, and drank her hot tea, scalding as it was, perhaps to hide something almost as scalding that had started involuntarily to her eyes. Reginald did not look at her. Hester put her hand on her father's arm, and said coaxingly—

"Redge doesn't always mean what he says, you know, papa."

Reginald, still looking west, did not attempt to defend himself.

"Hester, my dear, this is nothing new from Reginald," said Mr. Tracy quietly, stirring his second cup of tea; "we have discussed the subject of idleness *versus* work so often together, that you see, although I was merely speaking of the duty of fulfilling a promise, he goes off directly at a tangent to that well-worn subject—the delights of pleasure."

Mr. Tracy finished his tea; nobody spoke; the rocking-chair rocked; then he rose to leave the room, when his eye fell on that unlucky sketch. He bent over it, saying—

"A sketch of this house? and a very good one too, only not half finished. Who did it? Reginald? Ah! of course—*cela va sans dire.* Well, good-bye; remember me to your mother. We shall see you to-morrow, I dare say."

Reginald touched the extended hand, and then the young people were left.

"What did you get that stupid sketch out for at all?" asked Reginald impatiently, whilst Dorothy moved to another side of the room where her hat and

ulster were lying together on a chair, and proceeded to put them on.

"Because I *never* do the right thing, I suppose," burst out poor Hester.

Dorothy laid her hand caressingly on her shoulder, and said: "Never mind, Hess; you *try*."

Wrathful Reginald asked Dorothy where she was going; it was dreadfully wet. She would catch her death of cold.

"No," she replied, looking out of the window. "See! the clouds are all going, and mamma said I might go if it left off raining."

"You are going to those poor people with the soup, I know!" exclaimed Violet. "They only have meat once a week, Redge, and not that always!" Dorothy had not meant to say where she was going; Reginald was too much perturbed to think of any one but Dorothy and himself just then.

"Our roads lie together," he said to Dorothy.

"Aren't you going to stay to dinner, Redge?" asked Hester, feeling something swell in her throat.

"No, thank you; I was not asked." Then he and Dorothy went out together, and Hester and Violet devoutly hoped they might never have such another schoolroom tea. The door was burst open, and in came the two children—Kitty determined, Pat plaintive; his large blue eyes were extra prominent, and there was a gasp between every other word, as he said—

"You're both *very* unkind! you promised—that we—should have—a box—of toffee—at tea-time,—and we've *only* had—one nasty little bit!"

"One nasty wee bit!" echoed Kitty. But toffee

was quite out of Hester's thoughts then. She was standing in the window, wondering if she could get to Ravensleigh and say one word to Reginald alone, without any interference from his little mother; and whether she could be back again in time to dress, before any one should be any the wiser. She would not start yet, because she did not wish to meet Dorothy.

"Nasty cross *fings—bofe* of you!" protested Kitty, as she stood beside Pat; for Violet also, for a wonder, took no notice of the children, because she knew Hester's face so well, and was watching it anxiously, for it boded something desperate. Now, however, at this last thrust from the plaintiffs, she turned from Hester, and, holding out a hand to each, said—

"Come along; we'll go and ask Mrs. Teague if it's ready yet," which was a good opportunity for Hester's meditated flight. She rushed upstairs to her room, threw on her jacket and hat, then, opening a drawer, took out of a little money-box five shillings, her worldly wealth. Once her father had laughed at the idea of Hester ever having anything so orderly as a money-box, so she had bought one the very next day, for his sake; but alas! the lid had broken almost directly, and she had never mended it because, as she told Violet, "what *is* the use of weekly money if you can't get at it whenever you like?" These five shillings were popped into her jacket pocket; and then she walked up and down the room, waiting for the right time to start, when she might be safe from any detective glances, for she wished to avoid meeting any one who would question her as to her proceedings, and might put a stop to them altogether. It was a forlorn hope upon

which she was starting, but she was bent upon carrying it. She heard the children go down into the drawing-room; she guessed that Violet must be closeted once more in the schoolroom with *John Halifax;* she heard Dorothy trip upstairs at last to dress for dinner, and then in a very few minutes trip down again, for she was never long in adorning; and as the drawing-room door opened, a burst of laughter and fun, from the little ones and their "funny father," reached Hester's ears. Then the first dinner-bell went; and then Hester sped away downstairs and out at the garden door.

CHAPTER V.

HESTER, THE REFORMER.

BIRDS were singing in that delicious way they have of singing in the spring twilight; the leaden canopy of cloud which had blotted out sky all day had now broken into masses that went skurrying away before the wind, and showed here and there a clear field of light dotted with pale stars. The distance between Hengisthorne and Reginald's home was not great.

Hester passed through their own gates, then there was a bit of road, from which a short cut led her across a corner of moorland to the first gate of Ravensleigh, which was at some distance from the house itself; and behind the house lay several acres of park.

Hester had framed her speech, and planned her tactics. She would walk straight up to the door, ring the deep-toned bell, and say to the servant, "I want to speak to Mr. Treherne alone," and then she would ask to be shown into the study.

Here she was, over the moor, and close to the gate; but stay, who is that at the gate now, his arms folded on the top bar, standing like a statue?—and there he had been standing ever since he and Dorothy parted.

"O Redge! how you made me jump!" exclaimed Hester.

"Why, Hess! what in the world brings you here at this time of night? I thought it was some little girl coming for milk or soup, or something."

She went close up to him, and, looking up in his face, saw there such a wobegone expression, that—she could not help it—she actually cried. Most undignified, she felt, was her position, so very unlike what she had meant it to be; but there was the fact. She stood against the gate sobbing.

He passed through it quietly, and came to her side; and, as he most gently withdrew her hands from her face, he said: "What have they been doing to you? poor old Hess! In the wars again, are you? And you have come all the way over the moor to your companion-in-arms?"

"It's not what they do to *me*, Redge; it's what they do to *you;* and it's what you do to yourself; and it's the stupid mistakes I make! And I wanted to ask you something, and so I couldn't wait! And now I've come, I don't know *how* to say it!" She gulped down her last sob as he put his arm round her, and answered—

"You're a kind little girl, Hess. Never mind how you say it—say it anyhow."

She looked up at him with wet eyes, and dark locks falling about them, and to this day Reginald remembers how she said it—

"Couldn't you, don't you think, with all your money, build a lighthouse on the Bear Rock? Papa says it would save so many wrecks, and it would be such a grand thing to do?"

Reginald stifled an irresistible inclination to laugh, and asked: "Why, Hess—what a queer head you have!"

"Why, because papa says you would never do anything of the sort——"

"I am very much obliged to him, and I think he 's right."

"Would it take *very* long to do, and would it take *very* much money?"

"I suppose you mean a real house—a habitable lighthouse, so that my mother and I could take up our abode there, and not mind it in the least if we are occasionally reduced to living upon colza oil?"

"Now Redge! you are laughing, and I do *so* want to help you."

"Thank you, dear old Hess; I know you do, and I only wish Dorothy were more like you!"

"Dorothy is gooder than I shall ever be," sighed Hester pathetically; "but look here, Redge,"—here she fumbled in her pocket, and looked confused. Then out came her hand at last, with five shillings in it, as she murmured in her deepest tones—

"Papa gives me weekly money, you know, and I 'll give it all to you towards the lighthouse, if you 'll only begin to save for it too; and then I shall know what to say to papa when he says you spend a fortune on cigars." Reginald's brow contracted once more, in spite of the soft light which the offer of her poor little pocket-money had called forth in his face.

"No, Hess," he said, "keep your money. I am not going to start any lighthouses yet. So this is what you came for, is it?"

"I came because I was miserable; because you and papa and Do all made Vi and me feel dreadfully miserable. Vi *can* do other things when she is

wretched. I can't. And you never seem to care, Redge; that's what always irritates papa so! *I* don't care about learning one bit, and I never see papa so angry as he is then."

"Then we are too don't-cares, as usual, you and I; and so we shall be to the end of the chapter! Never mind what the others say!"

"Yes, Redge! I do mean to care now," said Hester stoutly. "I shall go on with the Danube to-morrow. I wonder what will make *you* care?" Again the tearful brown eyes were raised to the young man's face. She did not know that he was caring very much indeed for words which Dorothy had spoken—they were stern words, and they rankled. He was caring also for what Hester was saying, only, of course, she had not the slightest idea of it; the end would show.

"Good-bye, Redge," she said gravely.

"Yes, you must be off," he replied, "for it is dark. Good-bye, little brave-heart." He stooped and kissed her. "I can't walk back with you, because my mother will be waiting dinner for me. I'll stand here and whistle, whilst you run across the common."

"Thank you; I'm not frightened," she answered; and then she sped away through the darkness under the stars, with a lump in her throat, and little Kitty's prayer sounding in her heart: "Please God, make Redge's back strong."

Reginald turned away to the house when he had seen the last of her, with his head and heart so full, that Joss Compton's visit and his promise to him were not only a thing of the past, but almost as if they had never been.

Hester went headlong over the moor without thinking of where she was going, consequently she missed the turning that would have led her to Hengisthorne, and went blundering on further and further across the moor, unconsciously going straight away from her home, and in the direction of the sea. At first her mind was in too turbulent a state for her to take any note of this; older people than Hester have been known to be so much wrapped up in an all-absorbing thought as to go astray on even the most familiar road. But when, after twenty minutes' headlong rushing, she suddenly heard a noise like thunder, she stopped with a start—that was the sea! Where had she come to? She stood quite still now. Yes! certainly those were the waves thundering; how far was she from the edge of the cliff, she wondered?—those waves sounded so close. Hester was almost afraid. She was not generally wanting in courage, and she did not mean to be so now; still it was not a pleasant position in the dark, knowing, as she did, that the cliff was very irregular in places, and that a sudden unseen break might cause a fall into a ravine several feet below.

For a minute or two she did not move; it was very lonely; the wind had gone down; there was no moon; and that perpetual dash of the waves was becoming very depressing, echoed, as it were, by the occasional rush of the night breeze through some pine-trees near.

She thought of them all at home; dinner would be over; poor Vi would probably be sitting alone in the drawing-room, ready for the evening, waiting, and listening; the dining-room door would open and shut! mamma and Dorothy would glide into the drawing-room

serene and happy and complacent. But before they settle themselves, Violet would say, "Hester is lost!" and then they would be in dismay and wretchedness all the evening. Would they? Hester could not feel quite sure about that; probably they would go back to the dining-room and tell papa, and wouldn't he say sleepily from his arm-chair, "Never mind; she is sure to turn up; she always does!"

From that she turned to the more comforting reflection that the faithful Violet would really be miserable about her until she reappeared. At that juncture a strain of music more lovely than anything she had ever heard floated up to her from the sea, as it seemed to her. It was string music; she herself had a violin, upon which she much disliked practising, but if she could ever produce sounds like this, she almost thought it might be worth any amount of drudgery in the shape of practising.

It was enchanting—it was like all the fairy stories she had ever read; it was wild, sweet, and tender, all in one; it reminded her of Dorothy's voice, and her mother's smile, and her father's arms, and all her rebellious feelings against them, for Reginald's sake, went out of her heart; and common-sense—another note in the music—told her to retrace her steps, as she could then at least make a fresh start from Ravensleigh gate. However, she got on to the right track before going so far, and then she ran and ran until she was through her own gates. Standing in the garden door was her father.

"Hester!" he called out into the darkness, "is that you?"

She slackened speed, and replied hesitatingly, "Yes."

"Come here!" from him authoritatively.

Reluctantly she obeyed, but when close to him, she looked up into his face; she could see it distinctly in the light from the hall. There he was, the father whom she worshipped, whom she had thought of out on the cliff, who would not understand Reginald. She thought of nothing else but of his care for her just then, as she clung to him and murmured—

"Please don't ask me where I have been, only let me be still—here—for a little while! Hold me tight, and don't let the others come!"

He did hold her quite still and silently for a few moments; there was such a perfect understanding between those two, father and daughter, although he did tease her, and did say satirical things sometimes, and could be very stern when the occasion required.

With both his arms round her, she buried her face against him, regardless that her hat was crushed all on one side, and he let her be quite still for a while. All who knew Hester well, knew those sudden storms of hers—those freaks and whims, and outbursts of fun or daring, followed by as sudden a calm. At last her father said gently—

"But I wish you to come to the others, my dear little runaway; there's Vi composing an epitaph for you in the drawing-room; and Dorothy is absolutely fidgety, refusing to play, or sing, or do anything as usual; and mamma has been sending James in every possible direction but the right one, I fancy. And yet we are not to ask anything about it?" He was raising her head, from which her hat had now fallen off, and

he was stroking the dark hair from the eyes that were now lifted to his.

"No," she said gravely; "it was only one of my whims."

"Only, Hess, remember this," he said, as they turned into the house together arm-in-arm, "whims that carry you out-of-doors by night are not desirable, and they make others very anxious."

"Do they really?" she exclaimed, with wide-open eyes. "I thought nobody ever cared much what happened to me."

There was no answer, but a kiss, and the words: "Don't be a goose! run upstairs now, and make yourself a drawing-room swell, and come down to us all as soon as you can."

When she made her appearance amongst them Dorothy was at the piano, but she gave her a look and a smile which said plainly: "Incorrigible! but dearly loved."

Violet and her mother were winding wool together, and the ball ran away somewhere on its own account, and the skein fell into hopeless confusion, as Hester tumbled into the middle of it all.

Mr. Tracy said, from his remote corner, "Vi had just got as far as 'In memory of my sister, whose spirits were too much for her,' when she heard you coming, and pocketed it for a future occasion."

There, by her own fireside, in the midst of them all, inconsistent Hester, as she knelt down by her mother's side and held her hand in hers, partly let out where she had been by saying: "You know I was just a little bit scared when I found myself on the top of one of the

Chines. It was glorious on the heath, but I lost my way somehow, and made straight for the sea instead of for home."

There was a chorus of "Good gracious!" and "My *dear* Hessie; how *could* you!" and "Hess, you really shouldn't"—whilst from Violet came simply a shudder.

"Violet may well shudder," observed her father. "Imagine poor Vi quivering and quaking on the brink of a precipice! It is as well perhaps that we have only one adventurous soul in the family."

Then Hester thought of Pat on the roof, and although she caught Violet's warning glance, she was only checked in an impetuous outburst by a fumbling at the drawing-room door, which opened gently to admit a little figure with wide-open blue eyes and bare feet, looking more angelic in his white night-gown than he ever did in the day-guise of sailor-suit. He peered in amongst them all, and then made straight for Hester, and, before they could any of them speak for amazement, he, with his arms round her neck, said—

"I *am* glad you *have* come home, because I heard nurse say you were lost and nobody knowed where you were, and so we should never have got that toffee to-morrow morning, cos Vi said you had put away ours somewhere, she didn't know where; and I was just going to ask papa and mamma if I might tie a sheet to a chimney, to show you the way home, you know, because I can go up there, you know, like I did this morning, on the roof. But I *am* glad you've come home. A bit of sugar, please, papa." All this was said in a most jovial and hilarious manner, and the last was given almost as a command, with eyes turned on the tea-tray.

"When *was* he up on the roof?" was the question after the sugar had been given him, and he had been carried up to bed again in Hester's arms, who was dearly fond of him in spite of his tyranny—a question that was answered by Hester herself as soon as she returned to the drawing-room.

"I was just going to tell you when he came down," she began at once, and then she told them; graphically and concisely she sketched the position, her own fear, Violet's intrepid courage; then she wound up by saying—

"That's the sort of thing Vi does, you see, papa; I stood shivering and shaking, she went and saved Pat."

So Violet was dubbed a heroine, and Hester was scolded for having gone out on the roof at all in such a gale. "Not that I care about being called a heroine," reflected Hester; "Vi deserves it, and I never should deserve it; but I should like to hear Redge called something good in that tone by papa, because I know, by my own feelings, how very comfortable it is; why, Vi's backbone must have grown an inch this evening!"

"I have a letter from the Professor," announced Mr. Tracy, breaking in upon her reverie; "he is coming to-morrow instead of next week; will that suit you, my dear?"

Mrs. Tracy had a charming way of making everything suit, and therefore acquiesced at once.

"He is anxious to see Mr. Downs before he leaves this neighbourhood, that they may make an expedition to the Barrow together and discover further remains; he is still mad about that Celtic settlement, I fancy."

Even Dorothy looked grave; the very mention of the Professor always had that effect upon them all.

"Everything will be bones now, and mammoths, and

altars!" exclaimed Hester; "I wish you had not asked him these holidays, papa! he will make it *no* holidays."

"He is one of papa's dearest friends," their mother reminded her gently.

"Then I wonder how you ever got such a musty, fusty, dry, old friend, papa! Will our friends ever be like that?" and then Hester and Violet ran through a long list of their contemporaries, Hester winding up with, "and Redge, would he be like that by the time he is sixty if he went poking about amongst bones and reading old manuscripts at the British Museum? Fancy Redge like the Professor!" Hester and Violet were convulsed with laughter at this point, but their father silenced them by saying—

"If I saw any chance of Reginald doing one-quarter of the good in his lifetime that the Professor has done, I should be proud to call him———" Here the father checked himself suddenly; and Dorothy, putting aside her music, and setting herself to her work-box, said, with a blush—

"We can scarcely tell what we shall be at sixty, can we?" Upon which Hester said—

"Vi will be wishing herself back at sixteen then, won't she?—instead of longing to be over it and *out*, as she does now; and I shall be a stout old lady in a cap and spectacles."

"Not necessarily," observed her father; "and we all have a great deal to go through before that time."

"Yes," replied Hester solemnly, and with a profound sigh, "we have the Professor's visit!"

A glance from her father rebuked her, and she went on tiptoe behind him, and kissed the top of his head.

CHAPTER VI.

THE FLIGHT OF THE UMBRELLA.

"No, dear Vi, not alone; you and Hess cannot take that walk alone. I really cannot allow it, but nurse and the little ones are going there—to Angel Chine—this afternoon, so why should you not go with them?"

Violet's heart swelled within her at the very notion of such indignity; there was something so babyish in the idea!

Dorothy read her through and through, and when Mrs. Tracy left the room in saying those last words, the elder sister looked at the younger one as she stood in the window gazing out at the lovely spring afternoon.

Hester used to say that when poor Vi was sulky she could detect it in the very expression of her shoulders; so did Dorothy now, but she looked down again at the book she was reading, until at last Violet burst out with—

"It is treating me so exactly like a little girl—like a child! I do wish mamma would remember how old I am!"

Then Dorothy rose, and, going to her, put an arm round her as she said—

"Vi, dear, we have to be children all our life long in the way of doing what we are told to do. You will never grow too old for that."

"*You* are. *You* never have to do it," murmured Violet, brushing away a discontented tear that was rolling down her cheek.

"Indeed I do! I have to do it, or ought to do it, every day of my life."

Here Hester came in, and, at once perceiving the state of things, announced that nurse and the children were ready, adding—

"Nurse thinks it an immense treat to have us with them, you know," which very much mollified Violet. "And we need not walk with them," added Hester again.

They certainly did not, for Hannah, though long of limb, could not keep up with the progress of her two young ladies, and also make constant darts upon her own two small charges, who would be off amongst the fir-trees or losing themselves among the gorse-bushes, where they kept up a breathless hide-and-seek, if it were not for her ever-vigilant eye. The first thing they did was to rush off helter-skelter from the gate, Kitty taking the lead, and Pat following, in that charming race with the wind—with their own spirits—with one another, which made their powers of running elastic; not so Hannah's. So that all this skirmishing left her and the children far behind by the time that Violet and Hester reached the Chine.

It was a grand spot. It was as if the cliff had one day long ago rolled asunder, and, before finally settling, had tottered to such an extent that boulders of the

sand-rock had tumbled about here and there below,—and as if the beautiful moor on either side above had been anxious to cover all irregularities with picturesqueness, and had therefore scattered a profusion of gorse and small fir-trees down the sides, and sent the clearest of fresh-water streams trickling amongst them down to the sea. A road ran below, straight through the Chine to the shore; and walking down that road you have on either side of you a towering wall—not of bare sand-cliff, but massy, dark foliage, blazing occasionally in spots of golden gorse; fit framework to the shimmer of blue sea, crisping in white foam straight before you. Turn back, up the road again, with its gurgling attendant streams, and the Chine seems to be backed as well as sided by that glorious height of fir and furze, for the road takes a sharp turn further on,—whilst the canopy of deep blue sky might almost be a reflection of the sea itself.

This was Angel Chine, and those who had head and feet for it could clamber down by the paths which wound in and out amongst the gorse-bushes and the heath-tussocks, and which would take them at last straight down into the road, and so on to the shore. And of course this was what the two girls had made up their minds to do.

As they began the descent a faint cry from the cliff, like the mew of a sea-gull, came to them. Both laughed, and fluttered their handkerchiefs by way of a signal, knowing well from whom the cry came. At the sight of their signal, a tremendous "spurt" was made by Hannah, but she only got sufficiently near to gasp out: "Miss Violet! Miss Hester!" They steadied

themselves and looked up. There she stood, very like a lamp-post, they thought, clearly defined against the sky, clutching frantically at Kitty and Pat as they just then dashed up to her side on the edge of the cliff. "I 'm not going to let these children go down there," she proceeded to gasp, "and I 'm not going myself!"

"All right, but we are! We 'll meet you again on the cliff."

Off they went—slipping, stumbling, crawling, crouching—with the sweet nutty scent of the gorse-blossom all round them, and the fragrance of the fir-trees coming down in little puffs to them, and the sobbing of the waves sounding ever more and more near.

Violet was as good a climber as Hester, and both girls ran down the last bit of steep, irregular path as if it were simply a staircase; and then another run, down on to the sands! But as they ran round the sharp corner of the cliff, they saw, close to them, a cottage; fishing-nets were spread out on the sands to dry, and a boat, upside down, was being hammered at by a boy. It was Joss Compton, of course, who, having heard nothing more from Mr. Treherne, and having ever before his eyes that stern fact that money must be made by him as soon as possible, had overruled his mother's fears so far that she could let him go out fishing when it did not blow a gale. So an old boat was being made fit for service once more, and as he patched it and tarred it, and drove in the nails, it seemed to him that he was sealing the doom of the once dreamed of schoolmaster, and making himself a fisherman for life. His mother had urged him to "go

and ask Mr. Treherne again," but that Joss would not consent to do.

"No, I can't bring myself to beg any more, mother; if he wants me he 'll send for me."

Hester whispered to Violet, as they stood some little distance from the boat unobserved—

"This is Compton's son, I think—Compton is the fisherman, you know, Redge goes out sea-fishing with sometimes." At that moment an extraordinary balloon-like apparition came flying and bounding down the cliff, never stopping until it bustled past the two girls and was arrested in its frantic progress by the boy and the boat.

"Nurse's umbrella!" exclaimed Violet, as the boy, startled, left off hammering, and, seizing the umbrella, closed it; then seeing the two girls for the first time, he brought it up to them.

"Is this yours?" he asked.

"No, it is nurse's, thank you," replied Hester, now recovering herself from a severe fit of laughter. Violet winced at the idea of even "that boy" knowing that they had come out with a nurse.

"I expect Pat did that from the top of the cliff," added Hester, turning to Violet, who said with her woman's tact—

"Don't let us disturb you in your work."

"No! do please go on!" cried Hester eagerly—"and I should so like to help—may I? Is this tar?" She was peering into a black pot with a large black brush in it—"Do let me do some tarring whilst you go on hammering! it would be so lovely with this jolly fat brush!"

In vain did Violet suggest carefulness, for the sake of her new light-grey *beige* costume; but it was not in vain that Joss said: "No, I'd rather you didn't."

She dropped the brush instantly, and looked at him. What she saw was a well-made fisherman's lad, who had a face that emphasised his words; and Violet saw in the face much beauty, and much sorrow, and much of a man's determination. Violet thought him a little rude; Hester did not.

"What may I do, then? May I hammer?" she asked.

Yes; she might nail on that bit of wood, but he was afraid she would hurt her hands.

"Hurt them? pooh!" Off came her *gants de Suéde*, down they went on the sand, being picked up by the careful Violet; then she took the hammer from his brown hands, and the nails too, and hammered away with a will; whilst he, half amused, half indifferent, sat on the boat silently watching.

Violet stood by, also silently watching, until at last she felt the pressing need of something to say, and hazarded the question—

"Has your father gone out fishing to-day?"

"He was buried last week," was the short answer.

Both girls were shocked, and the hammering ceased. Hester could say nothing; but, after a minute or two, Violet said softly—

"Was he out in that awful gale?"

The boy nodded.

"And never came back again?"

Joss shook his head; then Hester impetuously cried out—

"Then how could you bury him?"

"We did not," was the answer, "but God did."

Violet's sympathetic eyes filled, she could say no more; but Hester, in those deep tones of hers which Reginald knew so well when she was in any trouble, said—

"One day there will be a lighthouse out there on the Bear Rock, and there will be no more wrecks."

"There must be no more sea," he replied, "before there are no more wrecks."

Hester felt nonplussed. Again she took up the hammer, and in her feeling for him she hammered her own thumb. It really was excruciating pain for the moment, but how could she show that she felt it, in the face of his agony?—for his pain was nothing less. So, just as if it had not hurt her in the least, and without even wincing, she hammered on bravely.

"But a lighthouse will help," she urged at last. "I think—I am sure *almost*—that one day Mr. Treherne will build one."

Violet, trying to roll up nurse's umbrella into a comely form, looked up in astonishment; on what basis, apparently firm as the Bear Rock itself, did Hester build this daring statement?

Joss exhibited no emotion; he only added bitterly: "Did Mr. Treherne say so? But then Mr. Treherne forgets."

In sorrowful amazement, Hester thought: "Has even this boy discovered that Redge wants backbone?"

She looked at him defiantly for a moment, but, as she looked, she felt that she could not resent the words as she might from some people. She could only say in answer—

"Every one forgets sometimes—something or other; now *I* forget what I learn in lesson-time, but Vi doesn't. That's Vi, picking up seaweed out of the waves; she's my sister, a year older than I am. But I should never forget if you were to say that you'd give me a lesson in this sort of work every day. I'd always come! Now this nail? here? Don't you do it—let me!" Then, with some masterly raps from her hammer, the boy smiling in spite of himself, she added, with a great sigh: "This is *so* much better than books!"

"What books?" asked Joss eagerly.

"*Any* books; lesson-books—geography, history, poetry, sums. I should like to burn them all!"

"Give them to me instead if you ever do mean to burn them," came from Joss in half-repressed earnestness.

"*Why?*" asked Hester; and such a long-drawn "why" it was! The hammering was over now, and she was sitting on the side of the boat beside him.

"*Why?*" he repeated—"because—well! because I'm just starving for books; I'd sell my dinner for a book any day!"

Hester's eyes opened still wider at this most unnatural state of things.

"Would you *really?*" she exclaimed at length; "I don't think you would! Fancy giving up roast chicken, and bread sauce, and brown mashed potatoes,

and gooseberry tart, and cream afterwards, for Mrs. Somerville's *Physical Geography!*"

Such a dinner and such a book were both beyond the comprehension of Joss Compton's uneducated palate and comparatively uneducated mind.

"I don't know about that," he said, "but I know I'd do a lot for some more book-learning; and when you've got sorrow and trouble, books help you to forget, don't they?"

"Do they?" said Hester very doubtfully. "I don't know; they always seem to bring sorrow and trouble to me. Perhaps your books wouldn't. What are they?"

A queer smile lit up his face, as he thrust his hands down into his pockets, and replied—

"Well! there's an old sum book, and there's *Half-hours with the Best Authors.* Mr. Scott gave me that—the Rev. Scott; ah! if he'd never gone away! I used to go up to the vicarage twice a week for lessons when I'd left school, but there's no one now. Then there's *Pilgrim's Progress*—its mine now, it was father's once; and there's a book about birds and animals; and there's Dr. Brewer's *Guide to Science;* and then, of course, there's the Bible. That's all our books. It's history I'm always wanting, and travels; but history most of all—English history."

Hester thought him still more extraordinary.

"We have so many histories," she said, with something like a groan. "I wonder if you would like Macaulay?—but then there are so many big volumes! Or Rollin, perhaps?—but then he's ancient, and awfully dry. Perhaps, Vi," she added to her sister, now joining

them, "our Bright's History would be the best, or our little Freeman?"

"What for?" asked Violet, wondering what Hester was up to now.

"For —— *him*," she whispered, nodding in the direction of Joss.

"You would like to have a history lent you, wouldn't you?" she added, addressing herself once more to him.

"I should like very much to make you a present of it, because I hate it, but papa wouldn't like it, because he bought it for us to use at the High School."

"I shouldn't have time neither now," he answered, "but it 's kind of you. Perhaps the history will come one day; anyhow, I 'm not going to be Mr. Feeble-minded;" and he got up, and, gathering his tools together, began walking away towards the cottage as if the girls and the tempting suggestion of books were both dismissed together. But he recollected himself, and, turning round, took off his fisherman's cap, and said: "Good afternoon." Violet and Hester called out "Good-bye," but Hester went after him, "stung by the splendour of a sudden thought," as she so often was.

"But supposing I were to come and read the history to you whilst you do your work?" she said breathlessly; "if you have nets to mend, I could read to you all the time you are doing them. Would you like that?"

His eyes sparkled as he replied: "That I should! and you could tell me all I didn't know, because you 've had so much book-learning. Any afternoon at four, I 'm here tinkering, or tarring, or netting."

"Then, I 'll come—I *will* come, whenever I can!" she said joyfully, holding out her hand.

He demurred.

"I notice that you don't call me Miss," she explained, "so we may as well shake hands." Funny etiquette was Hester's! After the parting hand-shake, he went on into the cottage, and she went back to Violet.

"Isn't this an adventure!" exclaimed Hester, "and I have told him that I will come and read history with him."

"Hess! you haven't!" and Violet then laughed as if she could not help it.

"Vi, don't; please, don't!" cried Hester in such real distress, that Violet, at the risk of choking, checked herself. For Hester felt some vague misgivings on the score of Joss having hinted at her being able to answer any questions he might ask during the reading. But anyhow, she felt as if here was a grand stimulus to *work*—something that would help her own studies, her own self-imposed task—by helping this lad. Really lessons were beginning to look less dry, now that she could see them in the light of—firstly, so developing her own backbone that she would be able to describe the process to Reginald, and so assist in *his* development of deficient vertebra; secondly, making this boy happy—helping him would be so very nice, she thought—she could go through any amount of trouble to attain those ends; so she assured herself.

"I tell you what, Vi," she said, so emphatically that, as she banged nurse's umbrella down on the road, the tip broke off against a stone, provoking Hester to

say in parenthesis—"Tiresome woman! now I must have it mended for her!—I tell you what," she continued, putting the broken point into her pocket, "I mean to work seriously, and not all the Reginalds and trout-streams in the world shall prevent me! Don't expect me to come out for the first two hours in the morning, because I mean to study hard. If I don't, how shall I ever be able to teach my boy?" Not even to Violet would she confess that, deeper than the wish to help this boy and to help Redge, lay the great wish —to be considered far away above the molluscs by her father.

"I don't think mamma will like it. She won't let us come here alone," objected Violet. But Hester saw no obstructions. She had made her plans, and, as usual, she at once saw them half carried out. As they climbed the cliff they heard a voice above them, and when they reached the summit they were greeted with: "Really, Miss Hester and Miss Violet!" and there stood nurse and the children waiting for them.

How long they had waited was never inquired, for Hester only smiled serenely as she put the dilapidated umbrella into Hannah's hands, and said: "Here is your umbrella. Why did you throw it over the cliff? It might have hurt us very much. I broke the point off; but I'll get it mended." And Violet took a hand of each little one. They had been dancing madly on the edge of the cliff whenever nurse had taken her eyes off them for one moment, and they walked tractably along now with their elder sisters, for the pleasure of whose company nurse felt she had paid dearly. Violet had to tell stories all the way home;

but Hester, being full of this fresh enthusiasm, saw and heard nothing but the history of England and Joss Compton.

Arrived at home, what sight met their gaze? Something had happened which they knew was going to happen, but which had been forgotten in the beauty of Angel Chine, and the charm of that interview with Joss Compton. As they crossed the hall they beheld a bundle of railway rugs and umbrellas, a large portmanteau, and a square tin case; and through the open drawing-room door could be heard a voice, monotonous and nasal, that was certainly not their father's. Both girls stood aghast, staring at these signs of a new influence in the house, until Hester said in a whisper of would-be hope and good cheer—

"I don't see little Primula's luggage, so, perhaps, she hasn't come." So speaking, she turned round suddenly to flee away upstairs, and very nearly fell prostrate over the Professor's tin case of "collections" on the floor behind her. The consequence was a metallic reverberation which sent Hester flying upstairs three at a time, whereas it had the effect of paralysing poor Violet, who was therefore caught when the noise stirred some one to call from the drawing-room—

"Vi! Hester! are you there? Come in and see Dr. Bonus."

An immensely tall man rose from the arm-chair near the door; not only tall, but stout. His well-shaped head was covered, where it was not bald, with yellowish-grey floss; eyes that were deep-set and blue, and could sometimes flash steel-grey lightnings, looked every one through and through; his lips were

thin and compressed, and the words he uttered—slowly and with most perfect articulation—were always grouped in the very best language.

"How do you do?" he said, with his usual dignified grandeur and benevolence, bending low over Violet's hand. "Are you quite well?"

"Yes, thank you," answered Violet, appreciating the courteous greeting, but envying Hester her escape at the same time. "Is Primula upstairs?"

"I regret to say that Primula was too unwell to accompany me. Had it not been for Mr. Tracy's kind and urgent invitation, which would take no refusal, I should not have left her," he added, addressing himself to Mrs. Tracy and Dorothy. "She is in good hands with her aunt; but we are never separated." Upon which Mrs. Tracy expressed the hope that she would be able to come to Hengisthorne when quite convalescent, which suggested the counteracting hope in Violet's mind that *that* might not be until it was time for them all to return to London.

That evening in the drawing-room Hester was remarkably subdued and silent. She could think of nothing but the face and tone of that boy who longed for books. She made all sorts of mistakes in her crewel-work mat, and at last sprang up and threw it into the fire, mat and silks.

"Hester, my dear child! Do you know what you have done?" expostulated Dorothy, whilst Violet looked up from her book and stared dreamily at the remaining remnants hanging on the bars.

"Yes, I know; but the thing would get into a knot, and the only thing to do when things *will* get into

knots and tangles is to burn them," said Hester impetuously. She had not heard the door open whilst she was speaking, and in another moment would have added in a tone of softened regret, as was her wont after an explosion: "But I am sorry I did it, for it would have looked very nice on mamma's toilet-table; I was doing it for her, and now it's gone." But before she could say this, a solemn voice behind her said—

"There is another way to get rid of knots, and that is—patience, by which we may disentangle the most difficult."

It was the Professor, of course. Hester, confused and angry, turned round, blushing, and said: "How d'ye do?" shortly enough.

Then her father came in, and putting his arm round her, so that she was held facing the obnoxious visitor, said: "Ah! you have not seen Hester yet; pale and thin from overwork—as usual—isn't she?"

Hester put up a hand to the hand on her shoulder, and, under cover of holding it, pinched it.

"The time will come," observed Dr. Bonus, smiling benignly; "it is not every one who is like my Primula."

"Luckily—no!" thought Hester, glancing at Violet, who held her book up before her face, determined not to exchange a glance with the sister who had the supreme faculty for making her laugh.

"We are very sorry your little girl could not come with you—are we not, girls?" pursued Mr. Tracy.

Here Violet's book most conveniently fell into the fender, and Hester was seized with a violent fit of coughing; so violent was it, that her mother roused herself from her sofa-cushions to say reprovingly—

"Go to the tea-table, Hester, and take some milk; Dorothy will give you some."

Sheltered by the shadow of Dorothy and the urn, in that remote tea-table corner of the room, Hester's convulsions ceased, and she was soon beginning a *sotto voce* account of their afternoon's proceedings, and had just reached the flight of nurse's umbrella, when fragments of a conversation between her father and mother and the Professor reached her, and they were such as to arouse her interest.

"There is, of course, the danger of women becoming too strong, too independent, in the present day," the Professor was saying; "but I have seen pitiable instances of girls being so hedged in by conventionality —by false notions of etiquette—that the necessity for freedom has been fatal; and what I say is this: give them a free and liberal education, bring them up in that self-respect and that modesty which are their own safeguards, and then—we may let them go anywhere."

"Yes," replied gentle Mrs. Tracy. "I quite agree with you. I have always thought so."

Hester was only waiting for that answer from her mother. The next moment a sudden fourth voice was in the midst of that council of three, and Hester was on her knees beside her mother's sofa—

"Then, mamma, if you think so," she cried, "you will let Vi and me go to Angel Chine alone whenever we like, won't you? It is only a mile away." She added this last, looking appealingly at the Professor for the first time in her life.

"My dear Hester! Why, you were there only to-day. You don't want to be going there again yet?"

"Yes! I do—we do—indeed!" implored Hester. "It is for something very particular, and nothing wrong." Her father and Dr. Bonus were looking on, amused and interested. "You *can* trust us!" she urged; "the days are getting long, and it is really for a very good object."

"Shrimping, I expect," suggested her father, laughing.

Hester took no notice of him, and continued: "The first time that anything happens to us I *promise* to give it up."

"When do you want to go?" asked the indulgent mother, smiling at such conditions.

"To-morrow—if we may—in the afternoon."

Then Violet looked up from her book—shy, reliable Violet—and, rising, came and bent over, and said in a whisper: "You wouldn't mind, mamma, if you knew."

Mrs. Tracy looked up at her husband, who, with the Professor, was going deeper and deeper still into the subject of women's education, but he turned from it just to give her the requisite nod of assent. That nod was enough. Hester had gained her point, and with a sigh of relief went back to the ottoman and the urn and Dorothy, feeling at the same time as if a great burden of responsibility were suddenly placed on her very unequal shoulders. Presently their pleasant low conversation in that cosy shaded corner was disturbed by this from the Professor—

"And young Treherne—is he at home now? What is he doing?"

"He is at home, and doing what he always does."

"Nothing?" suggested the Professor, so pleasantly that Hester gnashed her teeth.

"Yes—it is ten thousand pities," said her father gravely.

Then Dorothy became grave and silent; and Hester, in saying good night, omitted Dr. Bonus, which intentional slight passed unnoticed by the worthy man, who had other things to think about.

CHAPTER VII.

THE EDUCATION MOVEMENT.

HESTER was true to her word the next morning, and shut herself up in the schoolroom directly after breakfast. She had an English Literature essay to write, and she began it at once—Pope being the subject. Many and varied were the temptations to break off, but not to a single one did she yield.

First of all, the children came round to the window; Kitty determined and fascinating, with a bunch of wallflowers in her hand.

"You sall have them all, Hess, if you will come out wif us!"

"No, Kitty, I can't come out now; run away."

But instead of running away, Kitty called up Pat, and the two stood together, tiptoed, peering in through the open window at this marvellous sight of Hester at work in the holidays. Pat began at last in his shrill pipe—

"What *are* you doing lessons for now?"

"Oh! what bothers you are! do run away and play!" groaned poor Hester. They cantered away on imaginary horses, to tell nurse that a wonderful and horrible thing had come to pass, for Hester was doing lessons in the holidays!

Then Dorothy came in, garden-gloved, basket on her arm, to look for garden scissors.

"*You* here, Hess!" and then she came to peep over her shoulder, "writing an essay in the holidays!"

"Why shouldn't I?—then I shan't have to do it when we begin lessons again," somewhat gruffly replied Hester, beginning to think that abuse for idleness was almost better than this irritating astonishment at sight of her industry. Dorothy had the kindness to say no more, and was soon flitting about amongst the flowers outside.

Next came Violet, sauntering past the window, reading. Glancing in casually, she exclaimed: "O Hess! I never thought you really would! It is like summer this morning!"

This was rather hard from Violet; that "never thought you really would," which implies a distrust in the higher capabilities of one's friends, is sometimes worse than really hard words from a foe.

"All right! I know!—please go away," muttered Hester. So Violet passed on; and then the door half-opened, and some one evidently peeped in and beat a hasty retreat. Two there must have been, for as the door was closing she heard a man's light laugh, which she knew was Reginald's, and her mother's voice, also with a laugh in it, saying: "We must not disturb the student." It was rather too bad of Reginald, she thought, to treat her earnestness as a good joke, and she also thought the name "student" such an odious one that "dunce" would have been infinitely sweeter in her ears.

Those two might have come in without any fear of rebuke from the student in so doing; it would have been

easier, she felt, to persevere in her tremendous resolutions, if the mother had come up behind her chair, and, placing her hands upon her shoulders, had kissed her and said, "Well done Hessie!" and if Reginald had just said, "Poor old Hess!" instead of laughing at her like all the rest of the world.

"How very difficult it is to turn over a new leaf!" she sighed; "I had no idea of it before! And oh! you Pope, what an odious little man you must have been! And yet Miss Vivian lectured upon him as if he were well worth knowing. No wonder, though, that she said she could never take the least interest in him or his writings herself. Then I wonder why she expects us to! I noted down a verse of his somewhere, when she quoted it—here it is." Hunting amongst sundry scraps of paper much scribbled over, Hester came upon the only two quotations she had taken from Miss Vivian's lecture on Pope, the first was from the lines which describe his own home-life at Twickenham; the second was an extract from his satirical sketch of the Squire's wife, and did not exactly harmonise when she ran it into the other; but she was quite satisfied herself with the effect produced as she read it out loud, after she had copied it into her essay—

> "'Content with little, I can peddle here
> On broccoli and mutton all the year,
> To pass the time 'twixt reading and Bohea,
> To muse, and spill her solitary tea,
> Or o'er cold coffee trifle with the spoon,
> Count the slow clock, and dine exact at noon.'

"Horrid little man! to say he could be happy on mutton and cauliflowers all the year round, when he

was never happy all his life long!—always wanting some one to sing his praises! I shall never want any one to sing the praises of *my* brains; to be jolly—that's everything!—and free—and never to be with any one I don't love. Pope lived alone with his pen, Miss Vivian said; *detestable*, particularly if it was a pointed steel. Happy thought! I've got a splendid sentence now; this will do," and she wrote off rapidly—

"Pope was a cynic; he was very fond of mutton and broccoli; he lived alone with his pen; and he wrote ill-natured verses. He was a very *very* short man; and the Miss Blounts were his greatest friends. Bolingbroke was very kind to him—afterwards Henry IV."

"Now for a bit of Shakespeare! '"Put not thy trust in princes," for he often thought Bolingbroke might have done more for him.' There!—that's a good wind-up; and now I've got to copy out his 'Universal Prayer,' and I don't understand it one bit!" Just as she was preparing for this climax, she heard slow steps coming along the gravel path, and voices in earnest conversation. It was her father, and with him was the Professor; she recognised his steps and his nasal tones. Had her father been alone it would have been a different thing, but now she did not want to have any high encomium from the old Professor; so she dived down with a sudden plunge under the table, where she was perfectly concealed from outside observation. She could smell their cigars now; and now they reached the window, and paused—

"Oh! I hope they are not talking secrets!" thought Hester, "I never thought of that!"

"Would he accept the post of secretary to a member

of Parliament? I know of one now vacant," Dr. Bonus was saying. "His rooms in London would be conveniently situated; the labour would not be severe, even for one of his temperament—indeed I may call it very pleasant work. And it might lead to something further in political life; he takes an interest in politics, I think?"

Then her father, standing just in front of the window, said: "It would be difficult to say what he is interested in besides tennis and sport, and still more difficult for me to say what he would accept in the way of work. Unfortunately there is no necessity for work, and he has an utter distaste for it; so the result is an utter waste of fine capabilities. If he would only show some earnestness about anything that was worth it, I should have some hopes for him! Then his mother spoils him; to a great extent it has been her fault all through; only, that a man should not have more backbone!——"

Ah! that word again! Hester almost shuddered.

"I have always liked the lad," observed the Professor.

"Liked him!" growled Hester, *sotto voce;* "I should think so! who wouldn't?"

"But this waste of himself is reprehensible—I can call it nothing else," pursued Dr. Bonus; "quite reprehensible. However, I will speak to him about this secretaryship." Then they passed on, and Hester emerged once more.

"I did not mean to listen—I couldn't help it," she said to herself; "besides, I knew it almost all. Of course that 'he' was Redge. Poor, dear old Redge! they spoke as if brains were the whole world; they never

said a word about his dear old self altogether. It isn't fair to take any one in bits like that. But then, what papa says about earnestness"—she shook her head—"if he would only try! If I could only tell him that it's very pleasant to be in earnest!"—She looked at her map, and she looked at her Pope's essay, and she felt very doubtful about the pleasantness.

Evidently the subject of that secretaryship and earnestness weighed on the minds of Mr. Tracy and Dr. Bonus during luncheon, for they spoke little and the Professor ate still less. There was a Professor atmosphere about the table; only the little ones saved the silence from becoming gloomy by sundry cheerful questions.

"Mr. Professor!" piped out Pat shrilly, over his mutton-chop, "you don't talk much, though you are so clever. Kitty and I wondered what you'd say."

Before he could answer, Kitty, with the utmost gravity, plied him with a favourite problem of hers, for which nurse had never yet found a satisfactory answer; and only last night, when appealed to on the subject, had referred the little questioner to "that very clever gentleman" who had come to stay in the house.

"Mr. Professor," said Kitty oracularly, "what *is* a ghost?"

"Oh! yes, and please," burst in Pat breathlessly; "nurse says we are all dust—*then*, what part of us is angels?"

"And how are coals made?" pursued Kitty, her thoughts flitting from dust to cinders.

"And why do the stars come out when we are in bed and never in the day?"

"And who *was* the man in the moon?"

"And did you once go to sea in a bowl, with the wise men of Gotham? Nurse says you did, and, if you did, where is the bowl now?"

Violet and Hester were convulsed; their elders were distressed, because they were obliged to try not to be convulsed.

The Professor himself smiled benevolently as he said meditatively: "Little seekers after truth!" whilst Mr. Tracy "hushed" them, and told them to eat their dinner without talking another word.

It was a very hot sun that shone upon Violet and Hester that afternoon as they started for Angel Chine, carrying many books; many, because Hester could not decide as to which would be best, so she carried an octavo volume of Macaulay, whilst Violet had a "*History of England*, edited by Freeman," in one hand, and Green's *History of the English People* in the other.

"Don't you sit with us, Vi," said Hester; "I couldn't read a bit if you did. You might go and see his mother, mightn't you, if she 's at home?"

"I 'm going to sit on the rocks with *John Halifax*; I shan't come near you," laughed Violet; and so when they reached the shore she ran straight past the little cottage and round the cliff, to a corner where there was shelter from the sun, and where she could hear the waves lap pleasantly and forget all and everything in the romance of that English gentleman's life.

Hester saw her work before her, for there, under the boat, sat Joss Compton, mending his nets. As he rose to his feet and took off his cap, she felt a queer sensation. Here was she, the teacher, with three books in her

arms; there was he, the pupil, mending nets and waiting to be taught; then why should she feel small and shy, and almost as if she could say nothing?—and why should he, "a poor boy," look so remarkably noble—almost grand? She held out her disengaged right hand, as she said—

"I've brought Macaulay, and Green, and Freeman; I don't know which you would like best."

It was difficult for him to give an opinion, and so Hester, after opening each in succession, and rapidly turning over the pages with the air of a connoisseur, said at last, colouring up as she spoke—

"I think Freeman will be the easiest to read; Macaulay has such tremendous long sentences, and Green is so dry. I should like to sit inside your boat, if I may." In she jumped, whilst he prepared himself to listen below, taking up his nets again.

Poor Hester almost repented of her undertaking before she reached the foot of the second page, for there were so many hard names; then, too, from the corner of her eye she saw the nets go down, the hands lie passive, and the eager, intent face turned towards hers, and she felt sure that what she dreaded, a *question*, was coming. In order to ward off such a catastrophe, feeling quite sure that she should not be able to answer it, she hurried on at a rapid pace, blundering and stumbling, until at length she was obliged to stop to take breath.

Then came the inevitable question.

"Who was reigning over the Britons then? Was it a king?"

Hester thought so, but she was not sure; she could not tell him which!

"And how did he govern them? Was there any sort of parliament?"

Hester did not know in the least; these questions were very terrible to her! She went on reading again rapidly, and two pages were read without interruption; then came another question.

"I suppose they had no regular army then; and no ships worth speaking of?"

"Of course," she said at length, "there were no colonels and majors, but there were soldiers. And there were no steamers, but of course there were boats. And now I think I must try to read you six pages without our talking at all—without one single question." Even by that means she could not quite escape him, for at the end he took her back to where they had last spoken, and questioned her cruelly about the early English kingdoms. From the bottom of her heart, Hester wished that the Saxons had never landed on the coasts of Britain. For this was an ordeal; there was scarcely a question which she could answer, and all that she could do was honestly to confess her ignorance and then go on reading again; but somehow the spirit went out of her, and she began to get tired, which Joss discovering, said gravely and thoughtfully—

"Don't read any more; there's a lot there for me to think about. It's a wonderful new world to me; but they don't tell you much about it at your school, do they? I'd ask them about everything!"

Hester was silent. He took up his nets again, and, after a long pause, was the first to speak.

"I want to know so much, and there seemed no hope for it, till you came yesterday. History

is what I've always wanted, and lives of great men. Now, I suppose you know all about all the great Englishmen—all the great soldiers, and sailors, and scholars?"

"No, I don't; not all," said Hester doubtfully.

"But still, just to know some! It must be grand to learn!" The light that came into his eyes startled her almost.

"Grand!" she repeated; "I think it is a most horrible bother!"

"Of course it's not easy to get at it; there's always a little difficulty, like in everything else, isn't there? But I've always thought that to know more of the long-ago men and things must help us to understand men and things now."

Again Hester felt as if she were the pupil.

"I like things to be easy," she said; "I should like to mend nets, and hammer boats, and go shrimping. Do you ever go shrimping?"

He looked at her in some amusement.

"I do sometimes, when fishing does not bring in enough; besides, mother's afraid of the fishing on rough days—now."

"Why don't you get some work to do on land?"

"I tried for some, but Mr. Treherne has forgotten," the boy muttered.

"Mr. Treherne!" repeated Hester in a tone of aroused interest; "what had he to do with it?"

"I went up to Ravensleigh to apply for a place as gardener's boy, for mother's sake, because she can't bear the sea now. He was very kind; at least he gave us money," went on Joss with an effort; "and he said

he would ask his gardener; but I've heard nothing; he has forgotten, I dare say."

Hester wished very much that he had not, and felt indignant, not at the suggestion, but with Reginald.

"He's very busy, I dare say," said Joss; "he's got a lot to do and to think about, I suppose. He has all those books to read in his study; I saw them when I was up there the other day."

"I don't think he reads very much," murmured Hester, troubled. Then came another silence, once more broken by Joss.

"You couldn't read a bit more, could you?" he said.

And once more Hester diligently applied herself to the book, and tried not to think of Reginald's forget.

Violet all this time was seated under the shadow of the cliff, thinking what a world it would be if there were more men in it like John Halifax.

The cottage was hidden from her sight by the projecting corner of the cliff, but she was within ear-shot, for presently she heard a sweet woman's voice crooning one of the old, old hymns—"O God, our help in ages past." There was something in the low wash of the waves that chimed in well as an accompaniment. Hester and Joss heard it too, and he, with what nurse would have resented as an exceedingly familiar action, laid his hand on Hester's arm, and said—

"Hush! that's my mother singing!" They both listened, and then he added: "It's the first time since that night."

If ever a woman's voice had her heart in it, that woman's heart was in her voice then. Violet stole away from her corner so as to be nearer to the cottage,

that she might listen without being seen; but she *was* seen, for Mrs. Compton herself came out, and stood in the doorway.

"What is it, Miss?" she asked.

Violet, taken aback by the sudden appearance and sudden question, could simply answer: "It was your singing; I did not mean to stop you; I was listening."

Mrs. Compton said nothing; she looked towards the other two.

"That is my sister," explained Violet. "We live up at Hengisthorne, you know—Mr. Tracy's. And my sister promised your son she would come and read history to him, because he likes it so much."

The woman's face softened.

"That's kind of her," she said; "it's what he's always hankering after, more learning; won't you come in and wait?"

Violet accepted the invitation, and went into the cottage, where tea was set out—tea with no milk, and bread with no butter. A starling in a wicker cage, talking to itself in low tones, muttered occasionally: "We're poor fools, poor fools!" which seemed to make it all the more difficult for Violet to start any subject of conversation. Mrs. Compton sat in a high-backed wooden-barred chair, looking straight out of the window across the sea; her eyes wandered to that window as if from long habit.

"Isn't it very lonely down here?" asked Violet at length.

"It never used to be," was the reply; "it's a bit lonely now; and when Joss goes out fishing, it's awful then! I wish he'd give it up altogether!"

"Can't he get some other work?" asked Violet.

"Mr. Treherne did say he 'd get him a place up there as gardener's help, but we've heard nothing more; he 's got enough workmen, or he 's got enough to think about without us."

"We're poor fools!" shrieked the starling.

"Joss worries about the money, and tries not to worry about the book-learning he wants," went on Mrs. Compton. "And I 'm always a-worrying about both; but what's the good? As Joss says: 'What's the good of worrying?—it's all in the hands of the Lord;' but I 'd like to see my boy a schoolmaster; I would! He thinks of that sometimes, till he 's fit to break his heart, I know, out there over his nets and the boat, working away all the time; and then he comes in, and, 'Mother,' says he, quite brave and cheery-like, but with a tremble on his mouth—'Mother, you 'll let me go out reg'lar with the fishing-fleet, won't you? and you 'll never be afeared?—because of the money; it's sure and certain money.' And then I say, 'Yes; and you're thinking how, if there 's a little over and to spare, you can get some books? but, my boy,' I say, 'how can I let thee go when the sea is wild?' So he only goes but seldom, to please me. Mrs. Treherne gives me needlework; and we can just pay our way; but where are the books to come from?"

Mrs. Compton seldom spoke so freely to any one, but Violet's sympathising heart was in her face, and she was a good listener, which is often better than being a good talker.

Hester was plunging manfully through a maze of difficulties, hastening on to the end of the second chapter, which was to be their goal for this afternoon.

"We've not got on very far, I'm afraid!" she sighed, shutting up the book with a triumphant bang.

"Could you let me look at the maps next time?" he asked; "and then, if I can look out the places, and you will tell me all I want to know, we shall get on."

"Geography is very horrid," she replied gravely; "but still, if you like it——*I* think it's worse than history; but you seem to think history's a grand thing."

"Yes, I do," he answered simply; "and then, to be able to teach others what you know yourself, isn't that grandest of all?"

Grand! Hester had never looked at it in that light.

"I don't call lessons grand—not one of them," she replied.

He looked at her curiously, and then said: "I wonder what *you* think is grand?"

"I don't know," she replied wonderingly. "I've never thought about it. What do you call 'grand'?"

"It is grand to do as my father did," murmured Joss in answer; "and that was, he did his best always, and he never thought of himself; and it is grand to *know*—to know what wise men, who lived a long while ago, have taught us. It *is* grand to know a great deal."

Hester wondered if he would consider the Professor a grand man. She did not.

"And it is grand to be able to *wait*," he added softly; "to have patience, if we are working all the while. You are very happy to be able to study."

Happy to be able to study! what an extraordinary idea! He said nothing about backbones; perhaps he had not learnt enough to know anything about them; if so, she thought he was happy in his ignorance.

Certainly she felt that he had exalted her a little in her own estimation; but then, to be able to exalt him in this sublime ascent, how hard she must work! Violet came to the cottage door, and called her. Hester sprang out of the boat, with mingled feelings of relief and regret, as she said—

"We must go home now, Vi says; shall I come again to-morrow?"

But he was going out with the fishing-fleet to-morrow, so the next day was fixed for the second reading. They walked together to the cottage, teacher and pupil, the pupil being so far advanced in a certain sort of learning, that, as he looked away west over the sea, and thought of his father's boat coming in, as it always used at that hour, he could swallow down a certain lump in his throat, as he neared the door, for his mother's sake; and could, also for her sake, wear a smile on his face, as he saw her there waiting for him.

"Miss Tracy has been reading history to me, mother," he said; "it 's very good of her."

"Ah! if you could get the teaching and the books, you 'd be as good a scholar as any!" sighed the mother. "Good-bye, Miss, and thank you for coming," she said to Violet and Hester. "As to reading to my boy, those as teaches him gets taught themselves."

"We 're poor fools—poor fools!" chuckled the starling, fluttering in its cage above them.

The girls nodded back again and again, as they ran up the Chine road; in deep shade now, with brilliant blue sky still roofing it. On the moor—when they reached it, after scrambling up the cliff-sides—the evening shadows were slanting, evening scents were

rising, and birds in the pines were calling out good night to one another, in the very wide-awake manner which is always theirs at that hour. Then Hester exclaimed—

"Vi! I never felt until now what a stupid I am! I heard the starling say it as we stood at the door just now, and that was the finishing stroke!"

"But you can read," said Violet in some surprise at her despair. "And his mother said it was so kind of you."

"*Read;* yes! But that's not all; he wants to know the *why* of everything; and where every place is. And he makes me feel that I know nothing at all. I can't tell you what he makes me feel! And fancy, Vi! he thinks it is *grand* to do lessons; he and Miss Vivian would agree, wouldn't they? His questions were really too dreadful; I think I had to say 'I don't know' a dozen times. It's not at all easy this reading, I can tell you! and I shall have to work tremendously hard if it is to be of any use to him, and it will be such a grind in the holidays! But I must do it; only don't tell the others! Because I don't want them to laugh at me about it."

Violet promised the strictest secrecy.

As the two girls sat down to tea together in the schoolroom, Violet told Hester that Mrs. Compton and her son evidently had neither milk nor butter.

Hester was shocked; and suggested that, "perhaps, it had not come." But Violet did not think it likely that a milkmaid or butterman would take the trouble to go down Angel Chine in order to deliver milk and butter at Mrs. Compton's cottage.

"And we grumble sometimes," she said, "when we have no cake or marmalade; and *they* don't grumble because they have no milk or butter."

"I think I 'll try my tea without either," said Hester the heroic, "just to see what it 's like."

She thought the tea extremely nasty, and the butter, with its golden sheaf, looked so tempting. Nevertheless, she persevered; and, what was more, she told Violet that she had every intention of persevering in such abstinence for a week; to which Violet replied that it would not do the Compton's any good.

"You speak like a book, wise Vi!" retorted Hester; "but I think it would do *me* all the good in the world." She did not say another word about it, but she felt her resolution growing stronger.

"And what have you been doing, Miss Hester?" asked the Professor after dinner, seating himself on the ottoman, in a would-be friendly way, beside her. "Have you been enjoying the beauty of this lovely day, as we have?—or have you been sighing for the holidays to be over?"

"Did you, when you were a boy?" asked Hester, without looking at him, as she drew out her needle at the end of a purposely long thread in the direction of his nose.

"I forget; it is so long ago," was the grave answer.

But something more than the near approach of the needle stirred him, for he got up and walked away to the fireside; and Hester stopped working for a moment, to look at him in some wonderment.

"Then he really *has* been a boy," she whispered to Violet, who frowned; for the Professor was looking at them both.

CHAPTER VIII.

BACKBONE BEGINNING.

THAT task which Hester had set herself, and which she had called "a holiday task," had assumed gigantic proportions, for it involved so much more than she had ever dreamt of. And now, in addition to this, she had taken upon herself to go without marmalade, or even butter, for a week, and to take no milk in her tea. Not that she had the slightest idea of making a martyr of herself, nor that there was any absolute necessity for her to do anything of the sort. I am not setting up Hester as a model girl, by any means, and you must have found that out long ago, my reader, for yourself. No; she was brimful of impulse, and she generally followed her impulse wherever it led her, which may be the making of a noble character, always provided that the impulse is a safe one to follow.

She had learnt in a startling way this new fact,—that there are people who are forced to take their daily bread without even *scrape*, and their daily tea innocent of milk; and, as she cared for two of the people who so lived, she determined to try and taste that bit of their life.

Accordingly, at breakfast the next morning, Hester's sonorous voice was modulated sufficiently to say to her

mother, *sotto voce:* "Please, no milk, mamma, and weak tea, because then it won't be so bitter."

"My dear Hessie! no milk! Why?"

"I would rather not. I have a reason."

Hester's "reasons" were a by-word in the family, and were more often laughed at as "Hester's *un*-reasons." They were nothing unusual, and partly for that reason, partly because she was anxious to listen to her husband and the Professor, Mrs. Tracy said no more, but let her have her own way. Those dreadful children, however, did not let it pass unnoticed. How could she hope to escape, with one on either side of her?

"Why, how funny! Hessie 's got no milk!" cried Pat, in his highest soprano key.

Upon which Kitty, with a face of grave concern, paused in the mastication of toast fingers to peer over into Hester's cup, and to echo Pat's words in graver tones: "No milk!"

The Professor and Mr. Tracy were deep in an earnest discussion on the subject of a lecture to be given by the former, at the Town Hall in Wearmouth, the subject being, "Recent Excavations in the Neighbourhood—Celtic Discoveries."

"My point is," the Professor was saying, in measured accents, and striking the table emphatically with his forefinger, "that there *was* once a Celtic settlement between Wearmouth and Pond. The cromlechs there are an established fact, and if only I could as thoroughly establish the fact that burnt wheat has been discovered, deeply buried, I should feel convinced in my own mind that early British hearths had once existed there. And

to what other discoveries might not that be the first step? You are incredulous; but bits of tools and weapons, proved to be Celtic, have been already discovered on what has been called your *Roman* Encampment. You say that they prove no habitation, but simply a burial-place perhaps; but if once I could disinter grain—*wheat*, I should say—*that* points to a home, a settlement."

This exceedingly dry dissertation from Dr. Bonus had nevertheless arrested Hester's attention in the midst of the storm in a tea-cup raised by the children. She had caught his leading idea—upon which he was often said to be crazed—the finding of burnt wheat upon their heath; on the spot where he was in the habit of "poking about," as she called it, there should he find it, she determined—for rapidly, in her own mind, she laid the scheme then and there of a practical joke. Her tea tasted less bitter, as she thought of the fun of it; and there was a twinkle in her eyes, when Kitty, craning her little neck once more, said, inquiringly: "Don't 'oo want some butter?"

Hester declined, with a frown. Dorothy's eyes opened; but Hester frowned at her also, and so she only smiled, and said nothing, Dorothy being one of those rare people who can give a smile for a frown.

Once more from Kitty: "Don't 'oo want some *ds*am?"

Again a negative from Hester.

"How funny!" shrieked Pat; "Hessie 's got no milk and no butter! Hessie 's like you, Mr. Professor; she 's eating dry toast! Nurse says that old Mrs. Waddilove we know in London eats dry toast, 'cos she wants to be thin; but she says *you* can't eat it for that, Mr. Professor,

because you *are* so thin. I wonder what Hess eats it for?—because she wants to be like you, p'raps."

No reason more unpalatable to Hester could have been suggested. In vain she "*hushed*," and her mother hushed, and Dorothy hushed; for both children now took up the chorus as a capital joke: "Hessie wants to be like *you*, Mr. Professor!"

"Like '*oo*, Mr. Professor!" shouted Kitty, in fits of laughter, accompanied by a brandishment of spoons, and a clattering of plates, until at last there were half a dozen expostulating hands stretched out, over and on and between the two, and Mr. Tracy, with a slight contraction of the brow, broke off in his argument with Dr. Bonus, to say: "What *is* all this about?"

"Hessie 's got no milk and no butter, papa, and she doesn't want any! She 's too fat, papa; that 's why!" And both children shrieked with laughter again.

"If you must alter your *menu* for breakfast, Hester, I don't see why such a fuss need be made about it;" with which Mr. Tracy returned to Dr. Bonus and his lecture.

Neither did Hester herself see any occasion for a fuss; if anybody were justified in making a fuss, she thought it might be herself, for the tea was dreadfully bitter.

Violet came down at the end of all this, and when Pat began crying out to her at once, "Hess has got no mil——" and Kitty, in a loud whisper, "And no but——" simultaneously, and were simultaneously suppressed by Dorothy, she could guess that Hester's resolution of last night had been already put to the test. It was never necessary to make things as plain as a pikestaff to Violet; a few words, a glance,

a slight inflection of tone, would instantly tell her what some people would require to be told at length and in full detail.

Directly after breakfast Hester beat a precipitate retreat to the schoolroom, where she opened her little volume of history, and then took from the book-shelves some immense volumes, entitled *Encyclopædia Britannica.*"

"The very name is sickening!" she groaned; but Violet had suggested that by looking up one or two subjects therein, she might be able to answer *some* at least of Joss's questions. She would do it all herself, though Violet had volunteered help; but it was hard work. "So frightfully dry!" she muttered; here and there she solved a problem, but much she must leave unanswered; and then there was her own work—her unfinished map of the Danube. By half-past eleven she had certainly learned more than she knew before; but what uphill work it was! and, oh! the beauty of that morning was indescribable. With a sigh, she prepared her map; why, the whole morning would be a perpetual grind if she went on at this rate.

A sound of wheels on the other side of the house —Reginald's dog-cart—she was sure of it. So she stopped her ears to prevent further distraction in that quarter, but then discovered that she could not draw. Desperately she took up her pen and went on working. Presently voices came down the passage, and stopped outside the door, which opened to admit the very two she dreaded most, because they were the most beguiling, Dorothy and Reginald.

"Yes! here she is actually," said sweet Dorothy.

"Hess, dear, you have done enough work for to-day. Do you know that it is half-past eleven? We want you to come for a drive with us. Redge is going to drive into Pond."

He went behind Hester's chair, and, leaning on the back, looked over her shoulder—

"I say, Hess, you're giving Austria far too much of that; your pen ran away with you there, didn't it? Shows you have done enough, and want an airing. Come along—hurry up—Jenny's fresh this morning, and won't stand long."

"I *can't* come," said Hester, with a tremendous effort, as she applied herself more diligently than ever to the boundaries. "I must do another half-hour of this."

"Hess, dear!" expostulated Dorothy, "you have been here for more than two hours this morning. Surely you have been at it long enough; it is holiday-time, remember."

"Nonsense, Hess; you know you don't mean it," said Reginald, seating himself on the window-sill; "make haste; there's a good girl."

"I *do* mean it," she said, with a touch of indignation in her tone, quickened by the recollection at that moment of his forgotten promise to Joss; "and I don't mean to stir this morning till I've finished this map."

Dorothy saw that she did mean what she said, and went away in some dejection of spirit to report to her mother that Hester was too busy to go out. Reginald followed, and, to Hester's intense relief, without a word of reproach; but her relief was short-lived.

In another minute he appeared again, outside the window this time.

"You are a model, Hester," he said, "and you will be a second little Primula one of these days; but I must say you are rather a nuisance with it all; for, do you know what you have brought upon us? The Professor wants to go into Pond about his confounded lecture, and he is to go with us, as there is a place for him. We can only devoutly hope that the back-seat may come off, and that we may leave him sitting in the road—such things have been known to happen to dog-carts. But never has such a thing happened as Hester—our Hess—refusing Dorothy a favour, and me. A friend should show himself friendly—don't you know that? It will be a long time before I ask you to do us a favour again."

Hester, who had felt frozen by the personal comparison at the beginning of this speech—then ready to laugh, in spite of everything, when she learned who was to be the third in the dog-cart—now, at the wind-up, felt cut to the quick. She threw up her head, tossed back her hair, and said, with a choke in her voice—

"Redge! how *can* you?" It was *Et tu, Brute,* with a vengeance: the unkindest cut of all. Hard words from friends are far, far worse than hard blows from an enemy. Just then a distant voice called him, and he called back, "All right; I'm coming." So he left her, without another word.

Hester the heroic tried to bury herself in her work in vain. Joss Compton might find books a comfort in sorrow and trouble; she was quite sure she never should. Her right hand was shaking so much with the effort she made to control herself, that the Danube took an

unfortunate turn into Russia, where a hasty application of blotting-paper produced the effect of a large lake. But she accomplished the map notwithstanding all the drawbacks, only it was done in such a fashion as to fall far short of the standard of excellence which she had hoisted on that first morning at Hengisthorne. We lift our standards so high in the sweet freshness of early morning; then they get torn down by ruthless hands, or lowered by our own, which is worse; and when they lie all draggled in the dust, tears are powerless to restore them to their original bravery.

It was half-past twelve before Hester pushed her chair back, banged her books together, and, seizing her hat, rushed into the garden for a season of refreshing before dinner. Her father was walking up and down the lawn smoking; she saw Violet, basket on her arm, going down the kitchen-garden to pick some wallflower; she heard the children and nurse at their games in the distance; and she avoided them all. She wished to forget everything and everybody just for a little while, and to be alone with herself; so she turned sharply down a side-walk, where there was a little gate, which took her straight out on to the moor. Once there she felt almost restored to primitive energy, and she began jumping over the lower furze-bushes and the sand-hills, and the fresh wind from the sea blew her hair about her face; and everything was so full of life that she might have forgotten her books entirely, only some things have a way of secreting themselves so thoroughly in the pigeon-holes of our brain, that we are always conscious of them, more or less.

"If only I had not made this resolution, my holidays

would have been so much jollier," she kept thinking; "but then, if only I can help this boy—and help Redge too, perhaps—why, I suppose nothing ought to be more jolly than that; but certainly it is not pleasant to grow a backbone."

After jumping over sundry heath-tussocks and sand-hills, she suddenly remembered that it might be dinner-time, upon which she set off running all the way back to the house, and arrived in the hall panting, just as the others were trooping into the dining-room; Dr. Bonus looking much too serene to allow of the supposition that he had been dislodged from the dog-cart. Reginald was not there. She was disappointed; for she had so wished to be magnanimous, and to forget his unkindness to her, in order that she might remind him of his promise to Joss, or ask him if he would not find a place for him. However, it was given out in the family circle that Reginald was coming to dinner that evening, so Hester felt sure that things would be all right.

"For you see, Vi," she said earnestly to her confidante and prime minister, "Reginald might do so much for him."

Violet said that he *might*, but she did not see so clearly that he would.

"No, thank you," went on Hester. "Not a book will I look at this afternoon;" for Violet had suggested taking books and work out into the garden, into the shade of the cedar; it was warm enough to sit in the shade.

But Hester was moved by a restless spirit all that afternoon. It seemed such a long time to wait for the evening. She thought that very likely Reginald would

come early, as he generally did, and then she would be able to get him to herself, when she might make friends and ask his help at the same time. But the second dinner-bell was clanging when he arrived. She watched him over the staircase; she saw Dorothy slip out of the drawing-room, and she could see how very earnest her face was, although she could not hear her words, as she said in low tones: "Will you accept it if he offers it to you? I think he will this evening"—and the answer was—

"Certainly not, if he speaks to me in the way that he did this morning when I was driving. I have no wish to be indebted to a man who treats me like a child!" Upon which Dorothy said no more, but opened the drawing-room door and passed in before him. Dorothy's silence sometimes spoke volumes.

Then the children came clambering upstairs to bed, saying that the Professor had been their dear old pussy-cat.

"He crawled all over the floor, he did!" exclaimed Kitty, "and mewed just like our old Tom, and mamma laughed so!"

"And Do patted his head and stroked him," said Pat, "and Redge wouldn't play, and Mr. Professor pretended to scratch him with his claws!" And Pat shrieked again at the joke which Reginald had failed to see.

"He was *so* funny, he was!" sighed Kitty, with a beaming smile; "I love him vewy much!"

Hester did not feel inclined to echo that sentiment when the gentlemen joined them in the drawing-room that evening, all looking grave, and Reginald more than grave.

"That horrid old man has been up to some of his preachments!" thought Hester.

It was an unlucky moment to choose for developing her little plan for Joss Compton, but poor Hester was often unlucky in her tactics. Dorothy was looking out her music at the piano; Reginald stood gloomy as a thunder-cloud, on the rug; Hester, full of hope, and longing to hear her old friend speak to her in his usual way, went up to him as he stood there, and in deep tones, resounding throughout the room, began: "You know Joss Compton, Redge?"

"Yes," he answered indifferently, as if he were not paying much attention to what she said.

"Vi and I know him now," she went on; "we came upon him the other afternoon, and had a long talk with him and his mother; and his father was drowned, you know; and he is so fond of books, and he wants to be a schoolmaster; and he says he asked you if you would take him as a gardener's boy, because his mother is afraid of his going out with the fishing-boats in rough weather. He told me all this because I went to read history to him." By this time, of course, every one in the room was listening to Hester, and looking at Reginald for further explanation—Reginald who, from the moment that Joss had left him to the time present, had not given him another thought, having forgotten him in a far more absorbing thought.

"Well?" he said to Hester shortly, his colour rising, and not knowing exactly what she expected him to say.

"He says he asked you—and he has been waiting. You said you would let him know—and he has heard

nothing. They are very poor, and he wants to make some money," faltered poor Hester. It was dawning upon her that she had unintentionally dragged her friend Redge before a tribunal; did she not see the Professor turn away with a pitying smile, as if he would say: "How could you expect anything more from him?"

Then Reginald, roused, said sharply: "I have other things to think of before Joss Compton," saying which he turned away to the piano, and planted himself against the wall behind Dorothy.

Mr. Tracy, with a shrug of his shoulders, muttered: "Yes, the all-important Reginald Treherne comes first and foremost. So this is the mystery of Angel Chine, is it?" he said kindly, turning to Hester. For you see Hester had blurted out her secret, as she generally did. But, for a wonder, she did not heed her father; still less did she heed the Professor, who, in a tone of much interest, said: "And so you read history to this poor lad? That is very kind of you; very admirable."

Dorothy had dashed into the "Wallenstein Sonata;" Violet was telling her mother, in low tones, all about the Comptons, for she felt free to do so now; but Hester's eyes were on Reginald, and they were filling fast, for her great warm heart was filling with a deeper desire than ever to help Joss Compton, and with a strange bitter feeling of pain and of resentment, born of disappointment in this staunch friend of theirs. Why, when her father loved him, would he persist in showing himself in such bad colours?—false colours, she called them. And why had she been the cause of

such showing now? It was just like her blundering stupidity, she told herself, but Reginald was *too* unkind. Why were mistakes ever made?—and why were friends ever unkind?

Reginald only frowned upon her, and gnawed his moustaches; the sonata went scrambling on; Mr. Tracy had taken up the newspaper; and Hester did just what they thought she would do—dashed out of the room. They were accustomed to explosions from her; "sky-rocket" was one of her father's names for her. She had a way, when something had upset her, of precipitating herself from the room—flying up into her own room—fluttering about there like a bird in a cage for a few moments, and then reappearing amongst them, calm, and in her right mind. But things were more serious now, and, as she ran upstairs, she stormed to herself: "I *must* get up on the top of it all! I must get up much higher! There is nothing for it but the roof." So into the loft she went, and up the ladder, having left the door open, of course,—heedless Hester! The little trap-door was unbolted and pushed open; and there, as she stood on the roof, was the grand dark sky, full of stars, above her; and from far away in the distance came the throb of the sea on the shore. Hester was not dreamy—nobody could accuse her of that; but she had come to feel that things are so contrary sometimes, things are so difficult, things are so painful, that a great still solitude, like that on the roof, may be comforting. And somehow, the monotonous break of the waves sounded like a constantly reiterated "A—men," monotoned by the choir in their church at home; and

once having got the idea into her head, she could not get it out; a long drawn out "Amen" seemed to be reverberating all around her. But it was interrupted by steps coming up the ladder, and she thought: "It is Redge coming to make peace!—and to say he will help Joss Compton."

Now it happened that the Professor had been much struck by Hester's outburst, and had grasped the position of things in a moment. He knew that she was very fond of Reginald; he saw that she was full of enthusiasm for this newly-found *protégé;* and he could understand that it must have been trying to have had such a dash of cold water thrown in her face, for he knew something more of hopes and disappointments than she thought; and moreover, she was a favourite of his, though she was not in the least aware of it.

Having become troubled by her long absence from the drawing-room, he left it—without saying a word—to search for her. After having looked through all the downstairs' rooms, he went upstairs; seeing the loft door open, he went inside, and, as he heard a movement above, he began to ascend the ladder.

Delighted, Hester said to herself again, "It is poor old Redge! I knew he would come!" and softly she called, "Redge! is that you?"

But the head that appeared above the hole was grey, and the voice that spoke was not Reginald's voice.

"My dear!" it said, "I was getting uneasy about your protracted absence, for I felt your disappointment. What a beautiful observatory for star-gazing you have here! I can now show you the Polar Star."

The good Professor was standing against the parapet looking straight up into the sky, overcome by the splendid opportunity for studying the heavens, so suddenly revealed to him. But as he spoke, Hester—suppressing her wrathful surprise—silently slipped behind him, stepped down the ladder, and left him, star-gazing.

When the others at last came to look for her, they found her in bed, fast asleep, with a suspiciously moist-looking handkerchief clasped in the hand that was stretched over the counterpane.

CHAPTER IX.

FOR CONSCIENCE' SAKE.

Of course Dorothy had known all that was going on whilst she played her sonata that evening, and therefore the next morning, after breakfast, she followed Hester into the schoolroom, whither she had betaken herself with a heavy heart. Dorothy had the most charming way of entering equally well into games and into troubles.

"Hester, dear," she began, "who is this boy? I did not quite understand last night——"

Hester—perched upon the window-sill, and looking the picture of despair—told her, winding up with: "But what's the good of my trying to do anything of the sort? I always bungle. I shouldn't mind if it were only myself, but just see what I did to poor Redge last night."

"What did you do?"

Hester stared. "Do!" she repeated—"why, I made him feel as if I were accusing him to papa and you, and the Professor, and everybody—and now I feel as if we shall never be friends again—and it is all *so* horrid! Somehow things are much more jolly when I don't take any trouble about anybody or anything."

Dorothy put her arm round her and said: "I don't

think, Hess, dear, that I should worry about having annoyed Redge; he *ought* to have kept his word to the boy"—here she spoke quite angrily. "Nobody is worth anything if they do not keep their word, even in the very least; and when we try to do the right thing, we do sometimes get misunderstood."

Poor Hester heaved a heavy sigh, as she said: "If people could only help being very fond of people; and if only people never thought of making good resolutions, because it is so very tiresome to have to keep them." She was the very soul of honour, that schoolroom girl. "Are things much easier, I wonder, when you leave the schoolroom?"

Dorothy thought not. "But as to Joss Compton," she said, "why not let Vi read to him? She would just enjoy it, and she could do it without having to work so hard as you did here all yesterday morning."

The next minute she was sorry that she had said it, for the cloud on Hester's face darkened as she thought in silence: "Yes, Vi can do everything well; she isn't a stupid like me."

Dorothy hastened to continue: "Ah! but I forgot. Of course you like to go on with your boy yourself, now that you have begun—don't you? And he would like it better too, I dare say, only don't work quite so hard this morning. Here comes Vi, and now I must go off to the kitchen." She had done her best to soothe a troubled mind, and now made way for Violet, to whom Hester began at once—

"Dorothy has been trying to chirrup me up, but I am very limp, Vi. The whole world seems crooked this morning. Now, I know what you are going to

say, so you needn't say it. You're going to say, as nicely as possible, 'Isn't it yourself, and not the whole world?' So I'll answer at once: 'Yes, it *is*; I went to sleep on my back last night, and I got out of bed with the wrong foot first this morning.'"

Violet explained that she had only come to try and make things easier for Hester by offering to prepare the way for any further questions from Joss Compton, if Hester would let her.

A hug in Hester's iron grasp was the answer. So Violet rapidly skimmed through pages of Freeman's History, writing down notes for Hester all the time. "And then I can explain them all to you before you read to him, as we go along," she said.

Hester thought it was a charming arrangement, and immediately began preparations for another map on her own account, whilst Violet buried herself in the arm-chair with her history.

But after a very little while Hester came to the conclusion that no work was tolerable with a sore heart; and at the end of half an hour, when sundry sighs and groans had disturbed the other student, she started from her chair, and exclaimed: "I give it up, Vi!"

"Give up what?"

"Slaving in the holidays!"

"And Joss Compton too?"

This was a home-thrust, and Hester answered impatiently: "No, of course not! but I can't do anything this morning. I wonder where papa is?—out with that old Professor somewhere, I know."

"No, the Professor is preparing his lecture. There goes papa into the garden now for a smoke."

Hester darted from the room, and was soon strolling up and down the lawn with her arm in her father's.

"Well, sky-rocket! what is it?"

She was silent; he let her be so, and for some ten minutes they perambulated together silently.

"Papa," at last she began, "what do you think is the most horrible thing in the world?"

"The most horrible thing in the world?" he repeated meditatively—"well, I should say, a girl who has been sucking an orange, and then clings with sticky fingers to her father's coat-sleeve. No, Hess, I will be grave, as you are for once in a way; but, upon my word, yours is a difficult question!"

"Shall I tell you what *I* think? *I* think it is to quarrel with a friend—to say things that hurt some one you are very fond of—and then not to be able to say directly, 'I am very sorry.' That's the most horrible thing of all!—and I don't see the good of books—books—books one bit!"

Mr. Tracy could read that daughter of his through all her incoherent words, but he let her go on for a little while longer, without saying anything in answer.

"Books are all head, aren't they?—and quarrels and making-it-up-again are all heart, aren't they? So what's the good of trying to be very clever if—if—your heart feels like breaking?"

Poor Hester! this was real tragedy.

"I made Dorothy and Reginald so vexed last night—he with me, and she with him—and not all the histories and geographies would ever set it right. So what's the good of it all? I always tell you everything, don't I?" she said, half apologetically, rubbing

her cheek against his shoulder. "Mamma has too many headaches to be always bothered by me, and I am always doing things wrong."

The father's arm went round her closer; it made her feel what a father's love is. "My dear girl," he said, "if you have discovered that heart comes before head, you have made a great discovery, and one that is worth all the pain."

"But I don't want to make a great discovery if it hurts others," she complained.

"Ah! that involves so many questions," said her father thoughtfully; "but as to *head*—don't you think a heart without a head might go wrong?"

Hester thought it possible.

"And then you will see, as you grow older, the *in*direct as well as the direct benefit of close application to work; it tells not only on self, but on others—the far greater good. Then, too, there is something in the self-denial involved which *must* develop backbone."

Hester involuntarily shuddered, as she said, with a groan: "O that dreadful word! but would you please say that again about self-denial?"

Her father, astonished, and trying his utmost not to betray amusement, repeated his words. "As to backbone," he added, "I cannot think of any better word." He had forgotten his talk in the schoolroom one evening at tea-time, which Hester would never forget. "But don't misunderstand me, Hess. I don't mean self-imposed self-denial; I mean sacrificing one's own wishes to something that one knows to be higher—living up to one's knowledge of the highest duty, be it map-drawing or making up a quarrel."

"I could be happy if I never saw a map again," murmured Hester, "but I shan't be happy now till I've said that I am sorry."

"My dear Hess, I don't know what you have to be sorry for. We all admired your scheme for this lad so far as we could understand it; you pricked Master Reginald's conscience, and so he was angry—but you have right on your side. Of course it would have been pleasanter for him if you had shown a little more tact, but I am not sure that it is not far better as it is."

"*Tact?*—what *is* tact? You so often speak of women who have 'great tact,' papa, as if you liked it so much," sighed Hester, in view of another grace to be acquired; "please tell me exactly what it is."

Mr. Tracy pondered, and at last replied: "*Tact* is the finest consideration for the feelings of others, combined with a judicious handling of occasion and circumstance. That is what the books would tell you. To make it easy: a woman without tact is almost useless, for she is always treading on people's corns—I don't mean really, but figuratively."

It was her turn to ponder now.

"Backbone—self-denial—tact," she ruminated.

"But I see, dear little sky-rocket," he resumed, "that your very tender heart will take in none of this until you have salved old sores; you will be a true woman one of these days, Hess. Redge is in the lounge now with mamma—not too much angered by last night to come near the family, you see."

"To be a true woman one day!" Ah! little did her father know what a set-off were those words from him, with such a glorious hope in them, against the

frequent rubs! What did it matter though it should involve backbone, and self-denial, and tact? She would make them each and all her own, if necessary, so that she might be that true woman. She bestowed a shower of kisses on her father, and then went precipitately to the morning-room. Reginald stood looking out of the window; her mother, sweet and sympathetic, over a heap of pinafores, was saying: "You see, dear Reginald, he wants to see you in earnest, as a man must be."

"So I am in earnest about *one* thing," he murmured.

"Ah! but then he would have it in all things; unless it is so, he does not believe in the other." Then Hester appeared on the scene, and Reginald turned.

She walked up to him, and, holding out her hand, she uttered a gruff "How d'ye do?"—adding, "Mamma, he *is* much more in earnest than we know, I dare say—nobody knows anybody else. Redge, please, I want to speak to you"—this last in such an imploring tone, that Mrs. Tracy set her an admirable example of true tact then and there, by leaving the room to "go and get some more cotton." Then Hester stammered out to the friend who had learnt never to be astonished at anything she said or did—

"I hurt you last night, Redge." A pause; then again, "And you hurt me in the morning." Pause, with quick breathing, almost a sob.

"So we are quits, eh?" he said kindly, bending down and laying a hand on her shoulder.

"I don't know!" she said, with another half-sob; "I hope not; because, if we are, you would be very, *very* miserable."

"My dear Hessie," he said, much distressed and

quite at a loss how to go on; then in another minute he said, "*Never* be miserable, Hess, at having shown a friend, without preaching, what a miserable sinner he is." Upon which Hester came to this conclusion, that Reginald stood alone in the world of boys and men. Violet might rave about her John Halifax; Hester doubted whether any but "Redge" could have understood her at once and so thoroughly, at the same time that he acknowledged himself in the wrong at once in such an extraordinary humble way. So intense was the relief to her—so thoroughly did she feel as if the iron which had been entering into her soul had been entirely removed, and something very soft substituted, that she felt up to any amount of jollity. Nothing would be burdensome now; maps and history floated before her in beautiful visions of an accomplished task. She went back to the schoolroom, where patient Violet was still poring over her history, making many notes for Hester's sake—for her sake also quickly removing her hands from her forehead, so that Hester might not suspect that her old enemy *headache* was plaguing her just a little. Hester stood beside her without speaking for a minute or two, then said: "It's very good of you, Vi, to do that, but please don't make too much of it."

The luncheon-bell rang; and, presently, Hester was doubtful whether or not to be glad that she had promised herself to Joss that afternoon, for there was a great discussion, in which *all* took part, from the Professor down to Kitty. It was Mr. Tracy who started it, and the subject of discussion was, a drive to the Camborne Woods, where the Lent-lilies were in full

glory. Reginald, who had stayed to luncheon, said he could take two in his dog-cart; and he hastened to name those two—Dorothy and Hester.

Dorothy said: "Why not take tea and a kettle? We are allowed to boil it just outside the wood; and it is like a summer day. Things could be ready directly."

Mrs. Tracy, looking at Violet's heavy eyes, said that to be out that lovely afternoon would do her "worlds of good." The Professor said: "Charming! charming!"

And Mr. Tracy said: "Now, really, you owe me a vote of thanks for proposing such a delightful way of spending the afternoon!"

But there were three downcast faces. Pat and Kitty saw, in their prophetic souls, that for them it was not decreed to go; and Hester saw that if she went, as they evidently expected, it must involve the breaking of her word to Joss. If she stayed, would there not be a twinge of that self-sacrifice of which her father had spoken—a touch of that adherence to a higher call than one of mere pleasure? She made her bread into pills, and bolted them without a word. The children, on the contrary, pitched their voices in their highest key, and began a sweet little duet in unison: "Mamma! *do* let us go too?" "Mamma! thoo *po*mised!" "You *must* keep a promise, mamma; and you *did* say, that when you went to the Daffodil wood, we might go too!"

"Yes! thoo did!" said Kitty, nodding oracularly.

"My dear children, you *can*not, if there is no room," said their mother in a low tone.

"You know I can take Dorothy and Hess in the dog-cart," again said Reginald, anxious to make it

quite certain that the Professor was not going to fall to his lot again.

"Yes, but even then it cannot be managed," said Mr. Tracy. "We have only the Victoria in use down here, and, with me on the box, there would still be mamma, and Dr. Bonus and Vi inside."

Kitty's face was piteous to behold; Pat's was defiance itself. The kind Professor, wishing to be consolatory, said benignly: "And would not poor nurse cry if you were to leave her all alone?"

"You big donkey!" shrieked Pat.

"*Pat*rick!" thundered his father.

"Never mind, dear old boy!" murmured Kitty soothingly. The scene was assuming a pantomimic phase for some of the party; tragic for others; and now melodrama, in the shape of Hester, stepped to the front. She had swallowed the last pill, and spoke: "Might they not go instead of me?"

"Instead of *you!!!*" Oh! how trying was that chorus; unanimous from one and all except Violet, who had expected this from Hester, and therefore was silent.

"Yes; I can't go this afternoon."

"Why not?" (Chorus Number Two.)

"Because I promised that boy," she said stoutly. "He will be waiting for me."

"You can go to him to-morrow just as well," suggested some one. Then her mother spoke up: "Hester, dear, I cannot let you go to Angel Chine all by yourself."

"Mamma! you say that women and girls ought to be independent," pleaded Hester.

"Not in that way, dear; you and Vi together are different; but I want Vi to come with us."

"Of course! I don't want Vi to stay. I shouldn't let her if she did!" Poor Hester was wishing in her heart that she could act up to her highest lights without raising a storm of opposition or of remarks—must it always be so? "I can take nurse with me," she added. That was a happy thought of hers; and her mother, after a few pros and cons, gave her consent.

"Certainly your loss will be somebody's gain," said Mrs. Tracy with a smile, glancing at the two little ones, who, of course, thought Hester's abdication in their favour was exactly as it should be, and accordingly ate their pudding with a merry heart.

Her father gave her a smile—and such a smile! she put it away directly in the innermost store-cupboard of her heart. Dorothy smiled upon her also, but then her smile fleeted when Reginald said: "I don't think I shall go now." But Hester said "Nonsense!" to this, upon which he glanced at Dorothy, and, as their eyes met, Hester knew that he had no intention of stopping at home.

CHAPTER X.

PILGRIMS AND PICNICS.

VIOLET made an attempt, when alone with Hester after dinner for a minute or two, to protest that she too *must* stay at home, as she had constituted herself Hester's coach. "Nonsense," said Hester again, "I shall be all right. You have taken a lot of notes; leave me those and I shall do, dear old Violante."

When the carriage and dog-cart drove up to the door Hester went away up into the nursery, where Pat was dancing a fling and Kitty chanting a Hallelujah chorus, and nurse doing her best, under difficulties, to make them "fit to be seen."

"Well, to be sure!" she said, "it's not many little boys and girls who have such a sister," for saying which Hester silenced her by telling her that she was pleasing herself; and Pat assured nurse that Hester's treat was coming—for "Do you know," he said, "Mr. Professor says he is going to take her to look for burnt wheat on the Roman camp?" Off danced the children, clattering downstairs, black legs and sailor suit, little fur-trimmed cloak and big felt hat; off scuttled nurse after them. Hester knelt upon the large window-seat to watch the start, having a faint idea that Dorothy and Reginald might perhaps look for her to say good-

bye; and if they could not find her they would naturally look up at the nursery window, expecting to see her there, and then, discovering her, would wave a good-bye, which would be cheering to her drooping spirits. But drooping spirits do not always get these cheering signals so much longed for. Looking down she could see Reginald helping Dorothy up into the cart—Violet was already on the back seat; then he tucked Dorothy up carefully in the rug, and finally, taking his seat beside her, with an exchange of happy words and light laughter, off they wheeled.

Hester did feel lonely then, for it is not easy to look down from even so supreme a height without being disturbed when we see that we are not missed. But now the Victoria drew up to the door, and this time a man's step was heard on the stairs. If it were the Professor—Hester felt that she should hide in the nursery cupboard; but it was not the Professor this time—she would know that step in a hundred to be her father's.

"Good-bye, my dear daughter," he said. "Is the true woman beginning at this time of day? Things are forward indeed this spring!"

How dearly she loved that banter from him, because she could see all that lay hidden beneath. She was a funny girl, this Hester!—for her only answer was to seize his hand and cover it with kisses; then, as he left her, she took up her station once more in the window, and watched them drive away—all this time having waved a good-bye to her.

"Nurse," said Hester, turning round as that worthy woman reappeared, "I want you to come to Angel Chine with me, please. I am going to read history

to Joss Compton. You can sit at the top and wait for me, because you won't care to scramble down to the bottom, although Mrs. Compton is a very nice woman." But not all the nice women in the world would have induced Hannah Barker to descend the sides of that Chine.

"I wish you would just question me on these," said Hester, as they walked together over the moor, and, producing Violet's notes, she put them, in the most sanguine manner, into nurse's hands; but this was beyond the reach of even nurse's acute intellect. She began by reading out a few sentences without putting in a single stop, but very many wrong words, coming to a standstill at last on the plea that "Miss Violet wrote so strangely she could make nothing of it," which was the conclusion at which Hester also had arrived. Her spirits sank a little, as, after having pored over Violet's paper and found it hopelessly impossible to master it all at once, they reached the verge of the Chine. She quite envied nurse, who established herself on a bench under her large sunshade, and took from her pocket *The Family Herald*, saying—

"You won't be later than five o'clock, will you, Miss Hester? for I've got my kettle to boil for the children's baths."

Still lower did Hester's spirits sink when she came face to face with Joss, who, greeting her gladly, produced an alarmingly closely-written sheet of paper.

"There," he said, "I've written down all that I could remember"—and far more than Hester could; more even than she knew—"will you look it over, and see if it is right?"

Right! how could she presume to correct it, when it looked to her as clever as some of their head-girl's best work at the High School! She coloured painfully as she went through it, and, when at last she put it back into his hands, she stammered—

"I can't teach you! You know far, far more than I do; you are much cleverer than I am! Oh dear! oh dear! how stupid I have been!" and she leant up against the boat and let her "Freeman" go down on the beach, as she clasped her hands well-nigh in despair. Joss was much distressed. Nothing that he could say, however, would alter her opinion or change her mind.

"Well, then," he said gently, "suppose we take it in turns; one day when you come I will read to you—I will read my book to you to-day."

He went to the cottage, and soon came out again with *Pilgrim's Progress* in his hand. Hester agreed entirely to this side of the compact, but she evaded the other.

Never will she forget that hour. The boy was almost like one inspired; he put himself in Christian's place, and the occasional inaccuracies and slownesses were nothing because of the soul that was in them all. His enthusiasm carried Hester with him. She could imagine herself manfully striking up the Hill Difficulty. Valiantly she struggled with him out of the Slough of Despond. Bravely she lifted up her heart with him in the Valley of the Shadow of Death.

"And it is all *true*," he said at last; "it is no dream."

"Go on! go on!" cried Hester, "it is beautiful!" He did go on, until it seemed to her that nurse and *The Family Herald* and the boiling kettle were parts of a

dream, but that Christian and Faithful, with all that they dared and suffered, were the great realities. She looked at the face bent over the book, and as she saw the dark eyes now flashing with zeal, now melting with infinite pity, she could fancy what Christian's face was like as he drew near the gates of the Celestial City. But he was not carried so far out of the practical every-day world as to forget "the trivial round, the common task," for now he closed the book quietly, and said—

"I must go in to get tea ready; mother's working up at Mr. Treherne's."

"Oh! do please go on," implored Hester; "she can get it ready when she comes in, can't she?"

"No," he said firmly, and with that manner which nurse would have resented as "familiar;" "she will be tired, and she will be glad to find it ready." He rose to his feet; Hester's excitement and enthusiasm found vent in further words—

"I wonder you can think of anything else when you're reading that!" she cried.

"But the Progress is still going on—now," he replied, calmly enough. "And we are pilgrims too, and we've got our duty to do."

Hester's eyes opened to more than their usual width. "How can we be pilgrims?" she objected. "Why, they lived years and years and *years* ago!"

"These pilgrims," he said, touching his book, "never lived at all in years, and they are always going on. You have, and will have, your Hill Difficulty. I have mine, God knows; and the shining ones are leading us, if we will but stretch out our hands and lift up our hearts."

Hester had never felt so solemnly touched; a great

new meaning seemed dawning upon her; and,—because we always make a picture of any new revelation that does not fade away,—whenever afterwards she looked back upon the day when the meaning of life first dawned upon her, she always heard an undertone of waves, and saw great yellow sand-cliffs, and an infinite blue heaven ceiling them. Somewhere between them and heaven sat nurse under her brown sunshade, but she had vanished out of Hester's consciousness altogether.

"But you don't mean that the *Pilgrim's Progress* is *really* true?" she half gasped. "It did seem so whilst you were reading it; but how can it be?"

"True for always," said the boy emphatically. "So I must first go in and set the things and put the kettle on; but I'll come out again."

Hester sat perfectly still whilst he was away; boats went by, and she hardly noticed them; sea-gulls skimmed inland and swept far away, and she did not see them: she saw the volume of history lying on the sands beside her, unopened; she saw herself, a teacher, taught; she saw the golden vision of a higher life, shown her by this lad, a fisherman's son. But he was beside her again now, with a violin in his hand.

"Do you like music?" he asked. Without waiting for an answer he passed the bow across the strings, and presently Hester recognised the melody which she had heard that night when she lost her way on the cliffs—the melody which had made her think of curious old legends and fairy stories, of her mother's smile and her father's arms. When at last he paused, she said, in an almost awe-struck voice—

"This is real too! I heard the same music when I was lost one night on the cliffs. And it was you, then?"

"It was my brother," he answered.

"*Have* you a brother?" she asked, astonished.

He laid his cheek against his violin and said, "This is my brother; this is my second soul."

Then Hester felt that this Joss Compton was indeed far beyond her, and that she could never teach him anything again any more.

"I'll tell you the story of this," he began again. "My mother's father used to play in an orchestra at one of the London theatres, but he lost all his money—it was borrowed by a friend and never paid back; and then he lost his health, and his daughter, my mother, had to go into service. She was something better than *that*," said the boy proudly; "but her father, though it was bitter for him—for he was a scholar as well as a musician—used to say to her always that there was nothing better than duty; and she came down here with the family, and then she married my father, a poor fisherman, but a brave, noble man. And then they brought the old man to live down here with them; and as soon as I could handle anything he made me hold his fiddle, and he taught me how to play. He taught me so much out of his books too—that *Pilgrim's Progress* was his; but he had to sell nearly all of them, and he left me this." Here Joss touched the violin tenderly. "And father loved it too. So there is always something, you see. I haven't got books, but I've got my brother."

At that point the unusual sound of wheels clattering

down the Chine road was heard, and Hester, turning, saw Reginald's dog-cart, and Reginald himself in it, pulling up a little way short of the rough ending of the road, as he shouted, "You are to come with me, Hess, *now*. Hurry up!"

Hester sprang to her feet.

"Mr. Treherne has come to fetch me," she cried; "come with me, and ask him again about the gardener's place."

But this Joss refused to do.

"If he wants me, he may send for me," he said, with some dignity.

"Hes-*ter!*" came from the dog-cart.

"Good-bye," said Hester, lingering, holding out her hand.

He stooped to pick up the sanded Freeman; she was forgetting it.

"Will you be coming again soon to begin the next chapter?" he asked.

"No," she said decidedly; "*never*. I'll come to hear more *Pilgrim's Progress;* but how can I teach you, when you teach me?" Without waiting for any further answer than that which she got from the grieved eyes, she hurried off to the dog-cart, and sprang up beside Reginald, saying, "I couldn't help keeping you just a minute or two. You dear, good, old Redge, to come and fetch me!"

"Do you think we could have tea without you? Dorothy and I laid the deep plot as we drove along."

"Oh, but I forgot; there's nurse!" and Hester clasped her hands in despair, as they topped the hilly road and turned across the breezy moor.

"She's all right; I saw her, and told her she need not wait, as I had come to fetch you. Well, and what has been the afternoon programme?"

Hester was silent for a minute; then at last came "Redge," and a pause.

"Well?"

"You will think about a place for him as gardener's boy, won't you?"

"I'll speak to Forbes this very evening when I go home."

"Oh! thank you so much!" A silence, once more broken by her. "I am *never* going to read to him any more, Redge."

"Ah! too much of a grind for the poor little vagabond, is it?"

"No, no! don't say that!" murmured Hester, "but he knows far, far more than I do. Just look at this," and she produced his paper; "he has written *all* that out from memory."

"Terrible!" interrupted Reginald with a shudder.

"And fancy!" continued Hester, "how disgraceful it was for me not to be able to tell him if it was right or wrong! It showed me one thing—that papa was not a bit too severe when he told me that one day I should repent not working at school. That day has come!" she added solemnly.

"There are many days yet to come, Hess," returned her companion, flicking his whip; "what have you been doing, then, all the afternoon?"

"Doing? listening to him; he has been reading *Pilgrim's Progress*, and talking about it so beautifully! he isn't like a common boy one bit! And, do you

know, he says it's all true, Redge; and that we all have our Hill Difficulty now; he says that I have mine."

"What cheek!" remarked her companion.

"No, it was *not*," retorted Hester impatiently; "it wasn't a *bit* cheeky; he's not like any other boy. Have you got yours, do you think?"

"My what?" he asked.

"Your Hill Difficulty," and she fixed her eyes upon his face awaiting his answer.

Reginald planted his whip upon his knee, as he looked away from her, and muttered: "I should think I had!"

"Ah, then, do you know what he says?" she continued joyfully; "he says there are Shining Ones *now*, as there were *then*, always ready to lead us, if we just stretch out our hands and lift up our hearts. I never heard any one speak so, Redge. I think he gets it from his grandfather, who used to play on the violin at one of the theatres. I shall always think of what he said whenever my Hill is awfully steep."

"Poor old Hess! that was a sigh!" he said, looking down into her face.

"But you don't seem to see it all, Redge," she said wistfully. "He made me see it in a great flash. He says that we are all pilgrims, just as Christian was. We *are*, Redge; what are you putting up your eyebrows for like that?"

"I was wondering where the Progress was, Hess, with some of us."

"*That*, I expect, we shall find out as we go along," she said softly, "or afterwards, when we look back."

"Why, you're growing quite oracular, Hess; what's come to you?"

"It's Joss and the Angel Chine," she answered; "but, Redge, will you look at this paper of his, if I leave it with you? See, I'll put it into this side-pocket—may I?" She crammed it into his outside-pocket. "And you will look at it, won't you?"

"If I don't forget, yes. And now, here we are!"

There they were on the borders of the Camborne Woods; and there was a fire crackling up the dry dead leaves, and the kettle boiling above, and Mr. Tracy lying down smoking under his umbrella to shade said fire from the wind; and Mrs. Tracy was sitting beside him, and Dorothy and Violet setting out the tea, and the Professor dancing in and out of the trees with the children. When the dog-cart drew up there was a general cry of "Here she is!" And when she crept under her father's umbrella, and all the others were making too much noise to overhear, he said to her—

"And what did you teach your pupil this afternoon?"

"*Nothing*, papa; he taught me. I don't know *anything* at all."

"And if he taught you that, my little daughter, he has taught you one of the greatest lessons you can ever learn."

Then a game of rounders was proposed, and Hester was in "splendid form," they said; even the Professor played, although he got hit unmercifully, and always ran the wrong way. All played but Mrs. Tracy and Violet, who sat reading Joss's paper, which Reginald had flung into her lap, lest he should lose it in the harum-scarum of the game.

Her father came and peeped over her shoulder when the game was over, with the words: "What in the world have you got hold of there?"

Violet explained, and Hester explained further, that Reginald was going through them for her boy; *that* would tell in Reginald's favour, she thought, with her father, which was the reason why she had asked him to do it.

"I made no promise," said Reginald carelessly.

Hester looked at him reproachfully. The Professor laughed satirically, upon which Hester looked at him so wrathfully that a gentle hand was laid on her shoulder, and drew her aside with the gentle whisper, "Never mind." She turned and saw Dorothy; and Reginald, who was close by, also said: "Never mind, Hess; let him go this time."

"Ah! but my revenge will come," she said in hot indignation; "he deserves something for all the nasty hits he gives you! He must be a bit of my Hill Difficulty," she added, looking up into Reginald's face with an earnestness that was almost pathetic; "and Dorothy is one of the Shining Ones, I think—don't you?"

He did indeed.

For our Shining Ones need not be celestial; they may be those whom we have lived with all our lives—eaten and drunk with them, perhaps, without recognising that they shone, until the true meaning of things begins to dawn upon us, and then we see everything in a new light.

CHAPTER XI.

STEAK IN THE STUDIO.

Two things were the immediate outcome of that afternoon up at Camborne Woods. Two things? More than two; for how is it possible to enumerate the number of things that come out of one thing—how many results, direct and indirect, large and small, follow from one cause? One thing was, that Joss Compton was engaged as gardener's boy up at Ravensleigh; and another was, that a *real* picnic was planned for the next day—a small and select party, consisting of Reginald and the three sisters only, not in the Camborne Woods, but down by the river, in those sleepy, swelling pastures below the old Minster, where Reginald knew of such good fishing. It was because he had said that he should betake himself there the next day, with his fishing-tackle, that Hester had said she should certainly go with him—and why should they not all three go?

This was suggested and discussed as he was driving the three girls home in his dog-cart, Hester and Violet being on the back seat; in fact, those two were arranging the whole programme, for although Reginald assented in the proper places, he was much more intent

upon something Dorothy and he had been discussing in low tones a few minutes before—Dorothy who now sat silent and flushed, and said not another word. Neither did he to her; but he kept his thoughts for her, although his words were given to Violet and Hester.

O the strange things that were coming out of that picnic! They stood on the steps at Hengisthorne making final arrangements, excepting Dorothy, who went into the house at once.

"Two picnics two days running! Why, Hess, you are picnic mad!" said her father.

"*This* is not a picnic; it has only been a tea," she said; then, as Reginald mounted his dog-cart again, she lingered, thinking of that paper, longing to remind him of it, but afraid. The others had all gone in; she stood playing with the wistaria, that hung in clusters like pale, airy grapes round the door pillars.

"I know what you're thinking about, Hess," he said, settling himself to start off; but pausing, before doing so, to say this, as he flicked her gently with the whip; "you are wondering whether I shall remember the gardener's boy. I am going to see him about it now, straight away before dinner."

"*Are* you?" she cried, delighted; "and his paper?"

"I'll read it over this evening," he said, nodding to her as he drove away.

Thereupon Hester joyfully proclaimed it from the housetops that Reginald was taking Joss Compton in hand in good earnest, and that he was so clever; he would be able to help him far better than she could. Her father smiled, hearing these rhapsodical prophecies; and the Professor said, in what she considered his most

sarcastic tone: "Towards the attainment of what end, Hester, will Mr. Treherne further him?"

Those carefully rounded sentences always irritated Hester almost beyond endurance, and she now bit her lower lip hard, as she answered: "He will help him to be a schoolmaster one day."

"Poor lad!" said the Professor, with a shake of his head; "poor lad! I doubt it, Hester." Then Hester only refrained from giving a very rude answer by running out of the room; and on the staircase she ran against Dorothy, who, looking into her face, said: "Why, Hessie! where are you going? What is the matter?"

"Matter! only that *odious* man, the Professor! Such a revenge I am going to have! See if I don't! Poor Redge! it's a horrid shame! How is he ever to get on if they never believe that he will?" Naturally Dorothy could not quite follow her train of thought, although she might have a near suspicion; besides, it was almost dinner-time, and she was going to gather some wall-flower, to mix with the Camborne Lent-lilies on the dinner-table. All sweet things to be done fell to her hands to do. "Remember, Hess," she said reluctantly, before going on her way, "the Professor is one of papa's oldest friends."

"And so is Redge," retorted Hester. "Redge was papa's ward, and is almost like his son; and that spiteful old man is not going to escape unpunished. Redge is worth a hundred Professors! and I know he will do a thing if he says he will!" Dorothy sighed a little sigh, and wished she could think so too.

Alas for Hester! Reginald certainly did take that history paper out of his pocket in the evening, with the

full intention of reading it; but he took out a cigarette at the same time, and perhaps smoking made him dreamy. Anyhow, he went to sleep, and the paper slipped into the fender. His mother saw it there, and, not knowing what it was, took it up in the tongs, and put it into the fire; it was a dangerous habit, she thought, of Reginald's, to throw bits of paper into the fender instead of into the fire.

"Where's that paper?" he asked, when he woke up half an hour afterwards, and looked round him as if he had lost everything belonging to him, in that way common to people who take an evening nap, and start up suddenly from it.

"There was a crumpled paper in the fender—the bit you were reading," replied Mrs. Treherne; "but I burned it, because I thought you meant it to be thrown away."

"Poor old Hess!" he muttered; "she will be in a way. I'll get the boy to write it out again. Mother," he added, "I have engaged Compton's son as gardener's boy. He wanted work, and I have told him that we will give him fourteen shillings a week."

"Then I hope he will do his work better than the last—not dawdle over it."

"He is not at all likely to fool away his time as that young fellow did. He is far more likely to be caught studying in his wheelbarrow; he's a genius—a *protégé* of Hester's."

"My dear boy, I dislike a genius in his rank of life. A gardener's boy who is devoted to books is no good at all. I would rather not have him."

"But I have already engaged him," said her son quietly, "and he is Hester's pupil."

"Hester's! Hester—whose head is full of mischief from morning till night—how ridiculous! Fond as I am of the dear Tracys, I do think it is a sad pity the way in which they allow their children to do exactly as they like. The idea of treating a poor boy—a fisherman's son—as if he were a genius, is too absurd. They had much better leave him to his natural work; they will only completely spoil him."

Mrs. Treherne had fixed ideas on the subject of what she called "the lower orders doing their work, and the upper classes enjoying themselves," so that, perhaps, Reginald had not only himself to thank for his idleness. And whenever she spoke on this subject, particularly if she alluded to the Tracys in the above-mentioned way, it always had the effect of considerably stirring her lazy son.

"Spoiling or not, I have engaged him as gardener's help. You always like me to engage the out-of-door servants, and it's very rarely that I take the trouble to do it. Hester may teach him as much as she likes out of his working hours. As to her head—I don't care what she has in it—the less crammed the better, say I; but I know she has one of the truest and kindest of hearts, and one of these days that girl will be a rattling good woman. Mark my words, mother."

So both these friends, the lazy young man and the little schoolroom girl, prophesied for one another. And the prophecy of each will be fulfilled—some day—somehow—and somewhere.

. . . . . .

"I *quite* forgot!" said Hester to Violet, after they were in bed that night. "I ate bread and butter at

tea in the Camborne Woods. You see, Dorothy had cut it all ready. To-morrow, I 'll remember, because I mean to try it for a week."

"But to-morrow we are going to have tea at Mrs. Dysie's," objected Violet from her pillow.

"Well? what of that?"

"She is sure to have some of her delicious greengage jam," said Violet sleepily.

"I can say *No*," said Hester, but in a tone which implied that the anguish would be great.

"She will think it so odd," murmured Violet.

"I don't care if she does," maintained Hester stoutly. "I suppose if one minded being thought odd one would always be comfortable, and I begin to think one *can*not always be comfortable and jolly. Besides, Mrs. Dysie is a dear old oddity herself."

Mrs. Dysie was a certain quaint widow lady, whose cap was close, and her skirts straight, full, and short; whose manner and face were full of dry humour, her heart full of benevolence, and her rooms full of china bowls and relics of married-womanhood. She was the childless mother of all children—everybody's aunt; and although she had never had any brother of her own, was yet able to help Reginald, and others like him, where no one else could.

As to animals! To hear her talk to her cow, her old pony, her tortoise-shell cat, and her Skye-terrier—"You would think," said Violet, "that she knew their language, and that they knew hers;" and so they did, for it was the language of a loving soul.

But the girls were not due at her house until late in the afternoon; the morning must come first. And

when the morning came, it did not promise well for luncheon out of doors, although it bid fair for any amount of fishing. Instead of the glorious sunshine streaming in between the chinks of the Venetian blinds, which was what Violet and Hester had pictured to themselves, there was a gentle "pit-pat" against the windows, which said plainer than tongue could say it —"*Rain.*" It was no steady downpour, only a hurry-skurrying procession of clouds, which here and there spoke out their intentions, and here and there passed by. And, as ill-luck would have it, Dorothy came down with a sore throat. It was of no use trying to conceal it, for they could all hear it in her voice, and they noticed the effort it was to her even to swallow bread and butter; all the more so, because she tried to make pretence at nothing whatever being the matter.

There was no help for it; the *fiat* went forth. Hester and Violet, if the rain left off, might go up to Ravensleigh, and tell Reginald that it was useless to think of a picnic, but Dorothy must not go out at all. "Good people are scarce," said her father affectionately. She had wanted to go very much indeed, for a conversation begun in the dog-cart yesterday evening had not been finished satisfactorily. They had left it unfinished. She had told him that he did not understand her, and he had told her that she did not understand him, and she had thought that perhaps this morning all might be set right. For a misunderstanding between friends is miserable, and to set things right is such an infinite comfort. Nevertheless, only the slightest possible crinkle came in her forehead, and she just said to herself, "I must wait; it will all come in good time."

At about eleven o'clock the rain had abated sufficiently for Hester and Violet to start off for Ravensleigh, thankful to be free from "throats." As they turned in at the gate, who should they see sweeping the gravel walk between the shrubberies but Joss Compton. He touched his cap and went on sweeping, but this did not satisfy Hester. Violet passed on to the door quickly, for rain was coming down fast again. Hester paused in spite of the rain.

"Do you like this?" she asked. "Do you like this gardening work?"

"I suppose I *shall* like it," was the reply, as he went on with his sweeping uninterruptedly.

"When shall I hear some more of *Pilgrim's Progress?*" she asked, somewhat shyly. "I should like to hear some more of that."

The boy only shook his head with a smile, whilst he still swept on mechanically. That shake of the head seemed to say, "All that lies in the past—your history reading, my *Pilgrim's Progress*, is all put away now by this present work."

"Oh! but we must have it. You shall not go on gardening all day! Mr. Treherne has your history paper; he will tell you whether you have made any mistakes far better than I can; but I *must* try and read again to you; this horrid gardening shan't put an end to it all!" She had said only yesterday afternoon in her despair that she could never read history to him any more, and now, there might be no more opportunities! It is always so when the end comes.

The rain was coming down pitilessly, and the sweep-

ing sounded to her hateful, with its monotonous "swish-swish." Mrs. Treherne appeared at the hall-door; little, fat, matter-of-fact Mrs. Treherne. "Hester! come in directly!" she cried, "don't stand out there in the pouring rain!"

Hester started; she had forgotten all but Joss and the Angel Chine, and the Pilgrims. Reluctantly she obeyed, and followed Mrs. Treherne into the breakfast-room, where the remains of a very late breakfast were still on the table. Reginald was standing up against the mantle-piece, back to the fire, looking thoroughly put out, whilst Violet, conscious of feeling very small and very shy, and that she had very muddy boots on which had left their mark on the carpet, was trying her utmost to appear perfectly at her ease, as she sat on the edge of a large arm-chair. "She had no sore throat yesterday," Reginald was saying irritably, as his mother and Hester came into the room.

"I'm sure it is not wonderful that they get sore throats, if they all stand out in the rain, talking to gardeners' boys, as Hester was doing just now," said Mrs. Treherne, who, like her son, was put out, but not from the same cause, for a late breakfast and this early visit had disconcerted her. Reginald's clouded face had cleared a little at the sight of Hester, and now, seeing a flash in her eyes at his mother's words, he said: "But Joss Compton is Hester's special boy; isn't he, Hess?" This was quite enough for Hester to say breathlessly: "You have looked at his questions, haven't you, Redge?" Before he could answer, his mother said; "My dear, I burned them by mistake yesterday evening, and I really think it was a fortunate

thing that I did, for a gardener's boy who is buried in books will never do his work well."

"Oh! how *could* you!" exclaimed Hester; "he did so want them looked over and corrected, and he 's preparing to be a schoolmaster—at least he wants dreadfully to be one, if he can only find some one to help him."

"Never mind, Hess, he can write it out again, and I can look it over again," said Reginald good-naturedly, feeling responsible for the loss.

"We shall not often get the paths swept, nor the weeds taken up," murmured Mrs. Treherne over her work-table; "it is such folly to raise people above their station! I wonder your mamma doesn't tell you so," she added in a slightly severe tone, looking at Violet.

"I have nothing to do with it; it is only Hess," replied Violet, "and mamma lets her, and she didn't say anything about station, and I don't see that it matters one bit," went on Violet, strong in her sisterly partisanship, and imbued with the spirit of her favourite book, "for John Halifax was only a tanner, and he was a perfect gentleman."

"And St. Paul was a tent-maker!" burst out Hester. What made her think of St. Paul she knew not; she knew that she was only longing to find something that would utterly suppress little Mrs. Treherne, for whom she never cared much, and less than usual just now.

"You should not speak of what you know nothing about; St. Paul had not *always* been a tent-maker," retorted Mrs. Treherne.

"Well! I am sure Joss Compton is a gentleman in

feeling, whatever his work may be! he is not a bit like a common boy," maintained Hester, kindling warmer as the recollection of yesterday burned within her; she almost wished he had never been engaged by Reginald if Mrs. Treherne meant to speak of him always in this way. Reginald stood looking very cross again, and as if he did not much care what happened to Joss, being wrapped up in a disappointment of his own. Violet tried to change the subject by looking out of the window and making the discovery that it was still raining fast. "So we shan't get our picnic, Redge," she said mournfully.

"Picnic? no! I should think not!" said Mrs. Treherne sharply, and with that she whisked out of the room.

Then Hester looked up at Reginald. "What does his *station* matter, Redge?" she asked; "he has feelings like us. He loves work as much as I hate it—book-work I mean; I don't know what Mrs. Treherne means! But I do wish you had kept his paper more carefully." Had it been Violet speaking, he would probably have said: "Don't go on bothering about that boy!" As it happened to be Hester, he felt compunction, and said nothing; besides, just then he felt very much inclined to take Hester's side, being more than usually irritated by his mother's opinions on the subject of class distinction. At that moment Mrs. Treherne came back again, and began fussing and fidgeting about, in the way which plainly declared that she could settle to nothing, whilst Violet sat there staring, and Hester stood there pulling her glove buttons off and frowning, and Reginald looked as if there were no one in the room but himself.

"I suppose we had better go, Hess," said Violet at last. Hester could not bear to go without having said anything more to establish Joss on a higher level in Mrs. Treherne's opinion, but then, what could she say? and how could she say it? She felt as if some one or something very grand and noble had had a slur cast upon them, and as if she must do her best to remove it.

"He plays the violin *beautifully!*" she blurted out at last; and Reginald laughed—he could not help it, nor could Violet—at Mrs. Treherne's gesture of disgust, as she said: "My dear, I tell you that these geniuses are all very well in their proper sphere, but I don't care for them as helps to our gardeners; only Reginald would insist upon taking him—it is one of his whims."

And another of Reginald's whims came into his head now, and he was bent upon carrying it out.

"As it has turned out such a wet day," he said, "suppose we have our picnic in my studio—shall we?" His appeal was made to the girls, not to his mother. Now his studio was a certain large room over the stables, beloved by Hester for being always untidy and unlike any other room; many an hour had she spent there with him whilst he daubed away at his paints, or smoked his pipe, or worked his lathe; it was only the other day that she and Violet had implored him to have an afternoon tea there. The walls were draped with old draperies; various specimens of china were placed about, interspersed with fans and screens; old rugs adorned the somewhat rotten floor; the fire-place was pronounced to be "just like a cottage fire-place;" the window was small and diamond-paned—not the best calculated to furnish light for an artist, the light being

further obstructed by a tall pine-tree that grew outside. It was the wish to see Hester's face light up again, and also the spirit of *contrariness*, that prompted Reginald to suggest anything so unconventional.

"Lovely!" said Hester, echoed by Violet.

"My dear boy!" began his mother in consternation, "you cannot possibly have luncheon carried there, and up those narrow stable stairs!"

"There won't be much to take," he replied, "and it has always been a bargain that when we dine there we are to do our own cooking. Come along; and go and ask Mrs. Bevan what she can give us."

No second bidding was needed; off went the girls to the housekeeper's room, with the startling announcement that they should be very much obliged if cook would give them some eggs and a piece of bacon, for they were going to have luncheon with Mr. Treherne in his studio, and they were going to cook it themselves.

"Know how to do it!" said Hester indignantly: "of course we do; we have had ever so many lessons at the School of Cookery at home."

"But Mr. Treherne will not like such a mess to be made in his room," objected Mrs. Bevan.

"He proposed it himself," was the unanswerable answer. So he did, but not from any idea of pleasure for himself. "But as he never touches eggs and bacon, we must have something else for him," went on Hester, as the supplies, with all necessary adjuncts and implements, were ordered across to the "studio," being carried there by the kitchen-maid. "I have often heard him say there is nothing like broiled steak, haven't you, Vi?"

"Miss Hester, you can't possibly do *that*," remon-

strated Mrs. Bevan. But Hester silenced her by saying decidedly that it was going to be done somehow, although her heart sank a little when, on reaching the stable-room, they found everything set out on a snowy cloth, all ready for preparations to begin; whilst Reginald himself lay stretched on a lounging chair, smoking, and evidently without the slightest intention of moving. He lazily watched them break their eggs into the saucepan, and daintily fork about the bacon frizzling and sputtering on the fire. No two artists could ever have been more intent on their dearest work of art than were Hester and Violet on those eggs and bacon; but alas for artists sometimes, and alas for cooks too!—for in the transit, carefully and delicately made, from saucepan to dish, the eggs slipped, and the dish slipped, and the whole lay on one of Reginald's Persian rugs, a hideous mass of unsavoury pottage. Hester shrieked with laughing; Violet was covered with confusion; she disliked clumsiness and failure that might lower her to a "little girl" level. Reginald groaned without stirring, and besought them to "wipe it up." A cloth and a pail of water, hauled up from the stable below by Hester, effectually cleansed the rug, but where was the dish of eggs and bacon?

"And we are so hungry!" complained Violet. "Now then, Redge, it is your turn; the steak wants to be cooked," said Hester cheerfully. But Reginald did not see it; if they thought he was going to touch raw meat they were much mistaken. He had never done such a thing in his life. Violet declared she could not touch it either, and sat herself down before Reginald's easel. Hester began looking through his portfolio.

"Why, Redge! here is a face exactly like Dorothy!" she exclaimed, taking out a head under which were written some lines of poetry, comparing it to all that was lovely in nature. Violet glanced quickly at Reginald, who, still smoking, and still without moving, replied: "You don't go from here till you have cooked that steak, Hess."

Hester continued to bury her head in the portfolio, whilst Violet's fingers handled the indulgent artist's pencils and brushes. She had a decided talent for drawing, and she began to make a rapid sketch of Reginald as he reclined there at his ease.

Hester emerged again soon, holding another picture aloft, as she cried, "Why, here is another of Dorothy, and, I verily believe, there's another behind it. Yes! there is actually! Your portfolio seems to be all Dorothy!"

"Perhaps if you were to look long enough amongst all my portfolios you might find one that was all Professors," remarked Reginald laconically.

The very suggestion made Hester hastily shut up the portfolio, and desist from any further investigations, saying, as she did so, "Well! if I were on a desert island I should have to do it, I suppose, though I don't like touching a pink, flabby steak any more than you do, and I think you are both rather lazy. Vi means to have a studio of her own one day. Capital, Vi!" she added, peering over her shoulder; "give him the little pucker between his eyebrows, because he has it this morning. That pucker when it comes, Redge, always makes you look as you did when you said something was 'the curse of your life.'"

Reginald looked on with an amused look as she uttered these words, whilst preparing the steak for broiling. "I begin to think that that something *is* the curse of my life!" he murmured.

"I wonder what!" said Hester, but as she spoke, the blazing heat from the fire as she bent lovingly over her steak, sent her suddenly springing back; she forgot that Violet was seated close behind, who was very nearly precipitated from her chair by the violence of the shock, which caused her brush to fly ruthlessly right across the nose of her portrait.

"You little awkward colt!" observed Reginald, in real sympathy with the artist, whose equanimity, however, was scarcely surpassed by that of the far-famed philosopher when his pet dog upset the ink over his manuscripts. Hester was full of sorrowful apologies. "Isn't she patient, Redge? You and I would not have borne it like that. I should have stamped, and so would you, wouldn't you?"

"Yes; suppose, for instance, that some one had torn up your map of the Danube?" he suggested.

Then she stopped short in her cooking. "I forgot! I quite forgot!" she said mournfully. "I have done no work this morning, and I mean to do some every morning of the holidays, so I must go."

"Nonsense! you are not going yet. I want you here, and Vi doesn't want to go. I can't let you turn into a book-worm," and he stretched out an arm, and tried to catch hold of her, as she brushed past his chair on her way to her hat and jacket; "it is all make-believe, you know, Hess, all this wonderful love of study."

"It isn't love of it," she replied, crimsoning; "I wish

it was! but what's the good of feelings if you don't *do* them?" was her somewhat incomprehensible question. "Papa says I'm not anything that I ought to be; and he says that if *I* get industrious, I shall be able to help others to be industrious"—here she swung her hat over and over her arm, and looked at it steadily, not liking to look at Reginald—"and I would rather help those I care for than do anything else in the world—but I *hate* books."

"Do you think you will ever help me to be industrious, Hess?" he asked, looking at her curiously, as he refilled his pipe.

She said nothing. She heard the "swish" of Joss's broom beneath the window, and somehow, with a choking sensation in her throat, there came the crushing conviction that he was leading a nobler, higher life than their old friend Redge; that he was striving and straining after high and noble things, whilst Redge lay on sofas and smoked.

"Can you write out Joss Compton's paper again for him, Redge, do you think?" she said beseechingly.

"Not I! I dare say he will like to do it himself," was the lazy reply.

The glance shot at him then from the great brown eyes struck home.

"Little Hess," he said, "I can't have you turning reformer."

"I would rather be anything than a jelly-fish!" she said, which answer, and the tone in which the words were uttered, so convulsed him with laughing that they did not hear a step on the stairs, and Mrs. Treherne was in their midst before they knew it.

"What a terrible smell of burning fat!" were her first words; and well there might be, for the steak had fallen into the fire, where it frizzled and sputtered, and was taken out a cinder. Violet started from the all-absorbing easel, confused and ashamed. Hester had gone beyond Mrs. Trehernes and steaks, and stood peering out of the little window, trying to see if Joss were still there.

"They have burnt my luncheon!" lamented Reginald pathetically. "Vi has spoilt my canvas! and Hester has an attack of heroics!"

Hester took no notice, and Mrs. Treherne said, with all her usual hospitality: "My dears, you must come into the house and have some proper luncheon; Professor Bonus has just come, and will walk back with you afterwards. He wants to refer to that book of your father's, Redge"—she named it—"he thinks it will assist him in his lecture."

So this was the end of the picnic! And *this* was Reginald's opinion, uttered *sotto voce*—that better would a luncheon of burnt steak with his two girl companions be, than dining-room fare with the Professor.

As for Hester, Mrs. Treherne's plan sent her flying; with one bound from the window, she darted precipitately down the studio stairs, but she paused in the stable, being arrested by the—not unusual—sight of corn. Now was the moment, she thought, for carrying out a deep-laid scheme in connection with the Professor. They were never allowed to go into the stable at home alone, so how could she get grains of wheat, when she wanted it, without questions being asked? But here it was, all ready to hand. Some corn was hastily popped

into her pocket, and hardly had she deposited it when she was joined by the others.

"Hess, you are going to stay? My mother has asked you;" but she wriggled herself out of Reginald's grasp, saying: "No! a promise is a promise."

"But you have not promised any one," he objected.

"Yes, I have—*myself*. Don't you ever promise yourself that you will do something?—and if you do, you're bound to do it."

"Ah! it's all very well to say so, but you know you would have stayed if the Professor had not come," said Reginald. He had gone with her across the stable-yard.

"I shouldn't!" she protested—"why *will* you hurt so, Redge?"

"*Hurt*, little one? I've never hurt you so easily, it seems, as I do now!" he said in astonishment.

"No, because somehow things are beginning to look different," she replied; then, suddenly lowering her voice, "Here comes Joss, Redge! Won't you tell him about his paper, and tell him that you will just help him sometimes with history? You might easily do it now that he's working for you!" It all came out in a rapid flow of words; what possessed her to ask such an unlikely thing she knew not, but Reginald let Joss pass them by with a touch of his cap, and let him take up his broom and his barrow and wheel himself away out of sight on the other side of the house, whilst his only answer was: "You ask impossibilities, Hester;" with which he sauntered away indoors, and she for the first time in her life felt proud, as if he had wounded her dignity, and her head was held very high as she passed through the stable-gates, and along the road, on

to the moor. But what a queer nature it was! for in a very few minutes she was dancing and springing over the heath, full of her scheme. Violet had stayed behind, for she dearly loved lunching at Ravensleigh, even although it involved sharing the pleasure with the Professor and returning home with him, for Mrs. Treherne used on those occasions to treat her as if she were almost grown up.

Hester danced on, until at last she reached home, when she ran straight upstairs to the nursery, where she excited the astonishment of Pat and Kitty by burning her corn on the fire-shovel over the nursery fire, passing it through the flames quickly until it was black.

"Do horses like that?" inquired Pat meditatively.

"No, but Professors do," replied Hester unguardedly. Then off she went down to the study, where she settled herself to map-drawing until the dinner-bell should ring. Poor sore-throated Dorothy was lying there on the sofa, and Hester began telling her all they had been doing, and all that Reginald had said that morning.

"Hess, dear," said Dorothy, "if you don't mind, I would rather you drew your map without talking, because I can't help answering, and it hurts my throat."

Something more than her throat, however, was hurt by hearing that Reginald had spent his morning in just doing nothing at all,—after she had spoken so earnestly in the dog-cart yesterday, too, when he *would* not understand her.

"You must have some lemonade," said Hester gravely.

But something more than lemonade is needed to cure a sore heart; if it were not so, there would very soon be not a lemon to be had for love or money.

CHAPTER XII.

THE CONSPIRATOR.

"WHITHER away in such hot haste, my quiet daughter?" asked Mr. Tracy, after luncheon, as Hester, in her hat and jacket, ran against him in the hall.

"Going to meet Vi and the Professor," she said breathlessly, without stopping.

So she was; but she was going to stop at the barrow first. Across the garden she went, over the low fence at the end, and so by a short cut on to the encampment—so called, as well as barrow—which was now to be proved, by the discovery of burnt wheat, to have been something more than a battle-field and a burial-ground; even a settlement, according to the Professor. Down she crouched in one of the sandy hollows, where grass grew sparsely, and, taking out of her pocket a trowel and a little paper packet, she dug deep, deeper and deeper. Then, opening the packet, she scattered the burnt wheat first in this prepared trench and then in that, covering it finally all over, placing near each trench a sign by which she should recognise the spot again, but which should be indistinguishable to every one else. Then, springing to her feet, she stood up, on high level ground once more, and, shading her eyes with

her hand, looked across the moor in the direction of Ravensleigh. Yes, here they come!—the huge Professor and diminutive Vi, "like an elephant and a flea," thought Hester, quick in imagination, but not poetical. "Redge is not with them; that is just what I hoped. '*Must* go out for a drive with Mrs. Treherne.' '*Very* sorry to lose more of Dr. Bonus's instructive conversation,' aren't you, Redge? So poor Vi is getting the full benefit of it. She shall be taken in too, if I can manage it; I shan't tell anybody. Nobody cares except the Professor; and it is to serve him right for all his disagreeableness to Redge; it's only a very little punishment. I don't see why, because a man is a man, he shouldn't get punished for being disagreeable to one's friend. *I'm* not going to stand it if the others are."

Her soliloquy was closed by the nearer approach of the two pedestrians. She advanced to meet them. "And this is where I must come and excavate," he was saying; those being the last words of a very long and scientific discourse, to which Violet had been saying "Yes" and "No" at intervals, and now the sight of Hester was to her as the sight of water in a desert. She had paid somewhat dearly for her luncheon at Ravensleigh; for Reginald, courteous host! had discussed scientific subjects with the Professor all the time, whilst Mrs. Treherne had indeed treated her as if she were quite grown up, for she had talked to her about the trouble of servants, *à propos* of one of her favourite wine-glasses being broken. "Ah! here is Hester," broke off Dr. Bonus, when at last he raised his eyes from the ground over which he was walking.

"Dr. Bonus, won't you look for the burnt wheat now?" began Hester, as she walked on his other side; "we are close to the place, and it won't tire you so much as it did the other day, because Vi and I can help you." The Professor accepted her offer and her trowel with delighted surprise. "I brought the trowel on purpose," she explained, and Violet wondered what could have possessed her to do anything of the sort, and protested plaintively that she really could not stay, because the sun was so hot. So she wandered homewards, wondering at the strange things that happen in this wonderful world; for surely nothing would be too strange hereafter, if Hester were to develop a thirst for science, and become a willing disciple of the Professor. She supposed it was for Joss Compton's sake.

Of course Hester gradually led Dr. Bonus to the right spot, and, when once she had planted him safely there, she left him, saying she must really go home too now, after Violet, for the sun *was* very hot. A feeling, made up of nervousness and of a great desire to laugh immoderately, had taken possession of her, and she ran off, leaving him on his hands and knees, seeking for his treasure alone. She had not expected that this scheme of hers would entail so much anxiety, but certainly it was an anxious afternoon; and as she sat under the cedar with Violet, watching the rabbits let out for a run, she was haunted by the thought, What if the Professor were never taken in at all, but by some wonderful scientific test were to recognise her buried grain at once to be wheat of this present day, and not excavated out of the ages? What would his anger be like?

"We have never seen the Professor in a rage, have we, Vi?" she said at last.

"No, because he is a philosopher," was the answer; "philosophers are never angry."

"Dorothy's never angry either, and yet I'm sure she's nothing so dry as a philosopher," replied Hester.

Just then the white rabbit with a black spot over one eye leaped on to Hester's lap for protection, and as she folded it in her arms a large shadow was thrown over the lawn; a large form soon towered above them, and at the top of it was the Professor's face, positively beaming.

"Hester, my dear!" he exclaimed, "you little know the light you have been to me. Like the wise man of old, I can now say, 'Eureka!'—'I have found it'—for I have found the burnt wheat; and now the possibility of the Celtic settlement is *more* than a possibility—it is to me a *fact*. Hitherto, when I have talked of these theories of mine, I have been told, 'Yes, we have found weapons which show that the Celts may have fought here, but we must see something domestic before we can believe there was ever a settlement.' They have laughed at my fragments of pots and pans, but now that I can add *food*—real *wheat*—my arguments will be incontestable. My lecture will be the best of all my lectures. Hester, my child, I must kiss you for this."

But Hester receded several steps, with her rabbit in her arms, and her face almost hidden in its soft furry side, except her eyes, which peeped laughingly over its back.

"You are not going to show it in the Town Hall at your lecture?" she cried suddenly, aghast.

"Why not? But on that point I am not quite de-

cided," he said, striding off to the house, all aglow with most unwonted excitement.

Hester stood looking after him, over her rabbit's back, her eyes growing larger and larger. For a minute or two compunction had seized her, If his heart were so set upon this burnt wheat, was it at all likely that it would break his heart to know that it had only come from Mrs. Treherne's stables? Perhaps he never would find it out. What then? Would all Wearmouth believe that Professor Bonus had proved that the Celts *had* settled there? Would it therefore become a great historical fact for children's children to believe? And, after all, it was Mrs. Treherne's corn, baked over the Hengisthorne nursery fire, and buried by Hester Tracy. Oh, it was too good a joke! She could not reveal the secret yet—not even to Vi, nor to him, to spare him possible confusion. Spare him, indeed! When had he spared Redge?

As his departing form disappeared behind the shrubberies that were between the house and themselves, she turned her eyes upon Violet, who was sitting looking after the Professor with eyes fixed in blank astonishment. Then they both burst out laughing: "What funny things people make a fuss about, don't they?" exclaimed Hester. "What does it matter who lived here ages ago?"

"And besides," said Violet, "I heard papa say only the other day to Mr. Dawson, that 'it was a perfect craze of the Professor's, and nothing else; that as to the discovery of burnt wheat being any proof of a Celtic settlement, it was a marvel to him that a really clever man should be so possessed by an idea'—those were his

very words; and then Mr. Dawson said, 'Ah! but they are the very men who often have a bee in their bonnet.' That is what they think of it."

"And as to being excited about finding out Celtic features in the people here," exclaimed Hester, "I'm sure nobody would be any the better for that; I don't care who my ancestors were, because I am my father's daughter, and Joss Compton thinks the same, I believe. Poor Joss!" and a trouble clouded Hester's eyes as she thought of him. "I'm afraid Redge will forget!" she added meditatively; "I begin to think it's very difficult to show any one what they ought to do without being preachey. I suppose the only way is to do it one's-self; but then, some people have one thing to do and other people have another. There is Joss Compton working in Redge's grounds, there is Redge's library of books, and Joss is hungry for them all—funny things to be hungry for! but he is. And there is clever Redge in the middle of it all, able to teach but not doing it; stupid *I* tried, but couldn't do it. But I won't give it up yet; if Redge won't try, I'll have another try." Here she gave a despairing groan, adding quickly, "Mind, Vi, I'm not finding fault with dear old Redge; and as to anybody else finding fault with him—anybody but ourselves, I mean—they should pretty soon suffer for it, and they'd know the reason why!"

The two girls were sauntering towards the house now, for it was time to go to Mrs. Dysie's. On their way indoors they passed the windows of the morning-room; lattice-windows—at some little height from the ground outside. Dorothy was in the room, having been left at home with her sore throat when Mr. and

Mrs. Tracy went for a drive, and Dr. Bonus, notwithstanding his burnt wheat ecstasy, had chosen this as a fitting moment for begging her to use her influence in persuading Reginald Treherne not to waste his opportunities. He told her that when lunching at Ravensleigh he had been filled with greater regret than ever, that a young man with such brains should do nothing whatever with them. As the girls drew near, they could not see poor Dorothy flushing and paling alternately, as she stood silently listening and playing with the paper-knife, but they guessed she was there when they heard the long-drawn nasal tones articulating the words: "If a man means to do anything at all, he has generally begun to do it by the time he is twenty-one, and our young friend is twenty-two."

Then Hester said under her breath to Violet: "He's out *there*, for he's twenty-three, but we won't tell him so;" and the next moment she had sprung on the lowest branch of the pear-tree that climbed round the window, which was thrown open so that she could thrust her face in and say, "Bo!"—then, skipping down and drawing Violet away, she shot into the house and upstairs like a flash of lightning.

"*Nothing* is too bad for a man of that sort!" she ejaculated within the walls of their own room, as she sat on the side of the bed and drummed her heels on the floor; "I only wish I knew how to grind my teeth, and I would do it now, with rage!"

"Yes," said Violet thoughtfully, "you read in novels of people grinding their teeth and tearing their hair, but I don't think they do either in real life. At least not in the real life that we have seen."

"No, it would hurt so, wouldn't it?" objected Hester. "When I am in a rage, I'd far rather tear out somebody else's hair. Shouldn't I enjoy plucking out the Professor's top-knot now by the roots! I wonder Dorothy doesn't do it, instead of standing there listening so meekly."

"Poor Do!" said Violet compassionately; "people don't escape lectures when they are out of the schoolroom."

"*Nothing* is too bad for such a man!" again said Hester of poor Dr. Bonus, as she thought of retribution to come in the shape of burnt wheat.

A little impatient knocking at the door was heard, as from small but determined knuckles, and Pat's face peeped in.

"Hessie!" he began, "what did you do with that corn you were burning? I want some for my horse, my dear dray-horse. Don't you know? what you were burning over the nursery fire?"

Violet, whose head was in her basin, only heard part of this; Hester sprang upon the door and him at once, and pushed him outside, saying, in a low voice: "You mustn't say a *word* about that; I haven't got it."

"*Where* is it?" whined Pat; "I *do* want it! and you had such a lot! Where did you get it?"

"Hush! you mustn't speak about it; it's a great secret," said Hester impressively, "besides, it's very bad for horses."

She closed the door on the disconsolate dray-man, who went away much distressed and somewhat puzzled, for what *could* Hessie have wanted with that wheat? Violet had not heard enough to have her curiosity aroused in any way.

Before starting for Mrs. Dysie's, Violet and Hester looked into the morning-room to say good-bye to Dorothy. But they beat a hasty retreat, for there was an afternoon caller, who had taken the Professor's place, and Dorothy had to entertain during her mother's absence.

"How horrid it must be," observed Hester as they walked down the drive, "to have to be polite to strangers, when you don't want to see them, and are thinking of something else all the time! I always know, when dear old Do has that pink spot on her cheeks, that something has fashed her, and there she has to sit listening to Mrs. Dobell talking about the last new style, and a lovely brown velvet and satin dress, 'made short, my dear.' Fancy poor Do having to listen to that! That's what you'll have to do when you're out, Vi; and you'll like it, won't you? but *I* shan't; and I don't believe Mrs. Dysie ever did—I'll ask her. Here we are."

Violet reminded her that their mother often told them they must learn to listen patiently when others talked of what did not interest them, and very often—so their mother told them—they would be the better for it afterwards.

"But who in the world would be the better for knowing anything about a brown satin dress?" objected Hester.

Sweet was the home of Mrs. Dysie, outside and inside. It was only a stone's-throw from Ravensleigh, but about a quarter of an hour's walk from Hengisthorne. There were oak gates which admitted you into the neatest of front gardens, and from which the gravel

path swept round to the front door, which was at the side of the house—a delightfully irregular arrangement, the girls thought. And this little front garden was always bright with the season's flowers, which now were wallflowers, daffodils, primroses, and hyacinths. The house was white, and various creepers caressed it at all points, whilst a rustic-roofed balcony on the first floor was the crowning point of perfection in the eyes of Violet and Hester. "Only fancy, how lovely, to have a balcony outside your bedroom!" said Hester.

And when the house-door opened they walked into a charming square hall, in which stood an old-fashioned clock with three golden balls on it, and the rising sun and a sailing ship revolving on its broad old-fashioned face—the sun being up by day, and the ship by night; and a fascinating oak staircase led from the hall to the balconied bedrooms above. The drawing-room was opposite the staircase, a pretty room, with two windows opening on to the lawn; and a faint scent of dried rose-leaves, that seemed to be the very atmosphere of that room, was always associated with Mrs. Dysie's old china in the Tracy mind. There were studies of heads in sepia, which adorned the walls "by dozens," according to Hester. "Mr. Dysie was an artist—and a *clever* artist," used Mrs. Dysie to say. Violet thought it rather a doubtful fact, and so did Reginald, who was a frequent visitor in that house.

"In here—in here, children!" called a cheery voice as the girls crossed the hall, and there in the drawing-room sat their hostess, working at list-slippers. "Cannot get up, my dears, because I should disarrange my work—slippers for the poor invalids at the Convalescent

Home. Kiss me, both of you. O my dear Hester! you have knocked my cap completely on one side; very knowing it looks, I dare say, but not becoming in one of my years; and there you stand laughing, of course. Vi, dear, put it straight for me, will you? for you have an eye to the beautiful, and Hester has not; and will you add to your favours by going to make tea for me in the dining-room. I think I heard Hagar take in the kettle; and perhaps you would cut some bread and butter also. There are two loaves—the white Coburg and the brown whole-meal; but Hagar *would* set a dish for the cut slices, because she says it looks more *hospitable* for the young ladies, and she remembers how Miss Violet likes to cut them. Did you ever hear anything so ridiculous? Spoils you both; spoils you both dreadfully, that she does! *I* don't." Here the old lady's ceaseless needle and tongue stopped for a moment as she laughed merrily; then she went on: "But I must confess, that there is always to me something very inviting and at the same time soothing, in the sight of an old-fashioned China plate filled with daintily cut bread and butter; nursery days, school-days, drawing-room days, are all recalled vividly to my mind by that homely dish. But Hester has something to say, and Violet is longing to make herself useful; run away, then, Vi, my child, and call us when it is ready. And now, Hester, what are those brown eyes of yours speaking about? Thread me a needle, my dear; young eyes are a great blessing."

"I was wondering if you would tell us one of your stories this evening," said Hester. "And, if you will, *do* let it be about school-days and drawing-room days;

and O Mrs. Dysie! in your first drawing-room days could you ever take any interest in hearing visitors talk about a brown satin dress, and how it was trimmed?"

Mrs. Dysie laughed heartily again as she made answer: "Certainly, my dear. I loved to see pretty things, and to wear them. Ah! and I could tell you a true story of a brown satin dress—a story partly of school-days and partly of drawing-room days."

"Your long-ago days?" observed Hester.

"No, my *now-a-days*, I think," replied the little old lady softly. "But there is the tea-bell, and here is Reginald,"—for the hall-door was just then opened by Hagar as they were on their way to the western-lighted dining-room, and the young man—her darling—made them four instead of three.

He bent to kiss the dear old face, as he said, "We don't dine till a quarter to eight, so I have nearly two hours good, if you will have me?"

"My dear fellow, you know I would have you for any number of hours—on one condition."

"What condition?" asked inquisitive Hester.

"Why, Hess, how can you ask?" he said. "On the same condition that every one would have me, which is, that I should find something to do. Hester herself would have me as I am for any period of time—wouldn't you, Hess? She and I are the two vagabonds. And we like our vagabond existence; and if there are others who do *not* like it, well, we can't help that. Can we, Hess?"

But, for a wonder, Hester looked grave as she helped herself to a piece of dry bread; and Mrs. Dysie said,

with a knowing wink, "Some people are better than their words, my boy, and you are not going to make me scold you this evening. Hester, my dear, take a slice of Violet's elegant bread and butter, or, if you have set your affections on that particular piece of bread, you *must* have some of your favourite greengage jam with it. Pass the jam, Violet, dear."

But Violet, with one glance at Hester's face as she put bit after bit of dry bread into her mouth, knew that it would be a useless courtesy on her part; besides Hester herself spoke up: "No, thank you, Mrs. Dysie; no jam, thank you."

"Then you must have some butter, my dear. Redge, will you give her some butter?"

"No, thank you; no, don't, Redge, please. I don't want any, thank you."

"What will you take, then, child? Some of this year's marmalade. Ah! that was what you were waiting for, was it? In that glass hive, Redge, before you."

"She is under a vow, I think," he said, bending forwards, and looking into the flushed and honest face, that was so very sweet just then, thought Mrs. Dysie.

"Well! and perhaps I am!" As she spoke the sweet face was raised, and the short hair was tossed back out of the large dark eyes. "Perhaps I am; and why shouldn't I eat dry bread if I like it, Redge, without your making a fuss about it?"

"Hester! do remember," murmured Violet, "we are not at home."

"My dears, this is Liberty Hall to every one of you," said their hostess. "If Hester liked to ask for milk and water instead of tea, she should have it, of course."

"Thank you, Mrs. Dysie. I should like some tea with no milk in it."

"My dear Hester, I doubt if that is quite wholesome," replied the good lady in some dismay. As for Reginald, he sat looking at Hester in amazement—Hester, who was renowned—not for greediness, but—for her partiality for all good things.

"If it is weak, it won't hurt, will it?" she asked, and so patiently, that Violet could contain herself no longer.

"Hess!" she exclaimed, "I must tell them why you are doing it."

"No—I will!" said downright Hester, and pushing her chair back, she stood upon her feet as though about to make a speech at a public dinner. "It is because I have found out lately that there are some people in the world too poor to have milk in their tea or butter on their bread, and so I wanted to try what it was like, and so I made a resolution to go without for a week; and if you make a resolution, you're bound to keep it, in spite of all the greengage jam in the world." Then she drew her chair forward and sat down again, and returned to her bread.

There was a little silence, broken by Mrs. Dysie saying softly: "Tasting the wants of others truly—bearing their burdens, indeed!" and Reginald, reaching across to the cake and cutting it, said: "You draw the line at cake, though, Hess? You are entitled to that after your dry bread."

But Hester would agree to no such compromise, until their good hostess assured her that she should be quite unhappy unless she did so. To please Mrs Dysie,

therefore, she consented, but she insisted upon eating two slices of dry bread first.

"Absurd little creature! Doing penance like any benighted old nun of the dark ages," observed Reginald, with more love in his heart for that mad little nun than even he had ever felt before.

"Now, Reginald! I will not have her teased," said Mrs. Dysie authoritatively. "This is Liberty Hall, remember."

"I never mind what he says, when he says it in that way," said Hester innocently. "Will you tell your story of the brown dress to him too?—or will you wait till he goes home to dinner?"

"I like that!" exclaimed Reginald, "seeing that I came on purpose for a story, and had no idea that you two chits were here."

"I should have thought you were too old for stories," observed Violet.

"That shows how much you know about it," he replied. "Mrs. Dysie's stories are for all ages."

When they were all assembled in the drawing-room he threw himself on the old-fashioned couch between the windows, whilst the girls established themselves on the floor, one on either side of Mrs. Dysie's chair. A log crackled cheerily on the fire; but the further window was open, and bird-songs came in—those songs which never sound so rich and sweet as in the twilight of a fair spring evening.

CHAPTER XIII.

MRS. DYSIE'S STORY.

"I WAS a very puny, sickly scrap of a girl for my age at thirteen years old," began Mrs. Dysie, "and my mother had all sorts of fears and fancies for me, one of which was that the air of Tower Hill, where we lived, was not sufficiently pure and bracing; therefore, when a wealthy neighbour offered to take me with her to their country house for the summer and autumn, she accepted for me gladly. Not I, for I cried nearly all the way, though it was a most beautiful drive, in Mrs. Thistledown's own carriage with post-horses, and my little brothers were standing on the door-step to see me go, thinking that such grandeur as Ann was beginning to enjoy was grandeur indeed.

"The house at which I was going to stay was a very old house indeed—hundreds of years old; it is not standing now. It stood in one of the loveliest corners of Kent, and once upon a time had been called the Manor; but when I knew it, it was the Manor Farm.

"Mrs. Thistledown had a dairy which was the pride of the whole country round, and I can remember, as if it were yesterday, my first introduction to that dairy just after our arrival, when all the beauties of the place

were being shown to me. I can remember how the air outside was fragrant with the honeysuckle that grew over the roof, and I can remember, too, the cool fragrance that met us as we crossed the threshold, and the enchanting sight of large yellow pans filled with milk and cream, and the tempting rolls of golden butter daintily veiled by the most spotless of white muslin. 'My dear,' said Mrs. Thistledown, when she saw my admiring gaze, 'you shall come here as often as Mrs. Betty will let you. Mrs. Betty,' she said, turning to the dairy-maid, 'this little Miss Ann has come down to our country to get well and strong, and to put some roses into her cheeks, and so she is to go just wherever she likes, and to do just whatever she likes, within the bounds of reason and prudence.' Then Mrs. Betty handed me a little glass of new milk that was quite warm, and I think I have never since tasted anything that was half so delicious.

"The old house itself might have been gloomy, if it had not been so picturesque—so charming. There were stairs, and steps, and passages where you least expected them; and there were unexpected windows, too—some that were like church-windows, diamond-paned, and a little bit of stained-glass here and there—and always deep-cushioned window-seats, which especially delighted me. The fire-places had no grates, and such immense chimneys! and the wall-panelling was dark oak, nearly black with age. Over one end of the hall ran a gallery, and at the end of this gallery stood a very old-fashioned piano, and just beyond it was one of those beautiful windows, with a deep, low window-seat; and such a view! Not only could you

from that corner see every one approaching the house from the furthest gate, but you could see all over the country for miles round. That window and that gallery were also striking features of my first day at the Manor Farm, which were impressed on my memory then, and for ever afterwards.

"Mrs. Thistledown was taking me up the broad, dark oak staircase on the way to my room, and as we reached the last stair she said: 'Come down the gallery and look at the view, little Ann, from this window.'

"As we drew near, a heavy curtain, that partially concealed the window, was put on one side, and a tall young lady with golden hair, and in a brown satin dress, came to meet us. Mrs. Thistledown smiled when she saw her, and called her 'Belinda,' and said something about her being at her post betimes; and then she told her that I was 'little Ann.' The tall Miss Belinda stooped, and as she went down on her knees before me, so as to be level with me, she put both her arms around me, and kissed me; and I thought her kiss was like violets and mignonette. She took me to my room at the other end of the gallery, and she showed me that her own opened out of it; and just as she was unpinning my tippet with her slender white fingers a clanging bell pealed through the house, which made her start up—and in another minute I was all alone. I thought I had heard wheels, and so I looked out of the casement window, and saw a post-chaise with only the driver in it going away from the house to the gate. Then I wondered what would happen next, and how long I should have to wait in my little room; for I was

terribly shy, and, foolish as it may sound, and as it appeared to myself afterwards, I had not the courage to find my way downstairs alone. So I waited and waited; and I looked at the queer patterns on the window curtains and bed curtains—dragons and strange birds; and I counted the number of brass handles on the bookcase and the chest of drawers; and I discovered a lavender bag in each drawer, and the scent of the lavender was very sweet; but another scent was there sweeter to my hungry little nose—the scent of dinner. I had heard Mrs. Thistledown say that we were to dine at four o'clock, and at that moment a clock downstairs chimed out a merry chime of four quarters, and then it struck *four*. I felt quite sure that they must be going in to dinner, and yet I had not the courage to go downstairs by myself; for, supposing that they had forgotten me—as I felt convinced they had, and convinced too that some important person had arrived who had driven unimportant little Ann out of their minds—would it not be terrible to go down and find perhaps no place set for me, and for them to say, "Oh! here is poor Ann, and we have nearly finished dinner!" Just at that point I heard a footstep and a rustling, and tall Miss Belinda came into the room.

"'Poor dear little Ann!' she said; 'we had forgotten that perhaps you would not be able to find your way downstairs. Come with me, for dinner is ready.' I clung to her, so much so that I must have tumbled her beautiful lace ruffles at her throat, as I said: 'Oh, I am so hungry!—then you have not finished dinner, ma'am?' And Miss Belinda kissed me again, and called me 'Poor little soul!' Then she led me down

the staircase into the long, low dining-room, and *there* was a sight that eclipsed the dairy, although it did not eclipse Miss Belinda. Seated at the end of the table opposite to Mrs. Thistledown, on one of the old-fashioned high-backed chairs which we call *Chippendale*, was a gentleman—the gentleman of the post-chaise, I felt sure. As we came into the dining-room he put down his carving-knife and fork, and said: 'Ah, here is little Ann!' and he got up from his seat, and I thought his head would have touched the ceiling, but he bent as he drew near me. I can remember, as if it were yesterday, that Miss Belinda stood with one arm round my neck and her hand on my shoulder; and I can remember that the tall gentleman laid his hand on hers as he stooped to kiss me.

"Mrs. Thistledown called him Colonel Everard, but Miss Belinda called him 'Michael;' and if you wish me to tell you what he was like, I cannot—for I was never able to describe him. Only, whenever I read about St. Michael and his angels fighting, I thought and think of Colonel Everard; whenever I have heard of brave men, I have thought of him; whenever people have spoken to me of enthusiasm, Colonel Everard has risen up before me; whenever men speak of doing right and fearing wrong, I think of him; whenever I think of an Englishman who tried to do his duty in every respect of life, I remember Colonel Everard at the Manor Farm.

"Of course I was extremely shy at that first dinner; Mrs. Thistledown called me 'little mouse,' and Miss Belinda, who had a flush on her cheeks and a sparkle in her eyes, looked as if she might laugh one minute

and cry the next; Colonel Everard was grave and calm. After dinner I saw nothing of them, for Mrs. Thistledown carried me off to the drawing-room, and they went into the garden together, wandering about under the lime-trees and the old apple-trees, with bees murmuring sleepily, and deep inviting shadows from the summer sun all over the cool orchard grass.

"I was so tired with my journey that Mrs. Thistledown sent me to bed before sunset, and I was very soon asleep.

"When I awoke the sun had set, but it was twilight still. I awoke from a bad dream. It was about Colonel Everard and Miss Belinda. I thought he was going away in that post-chaise again, and she was crying bitterly; I remember feeling it such a relief to know that it was a dream. I had started up in bed, and before I settled myself again for sleep I thought I heard music. I listened; yes—certainly it was some one singing, and it was a man's voice.

"So I got out of bed, and I opened my door very gently and looked down the gallery, and there, at the far end I saw Miss Belinda seated at the old-fashioned piano, and standing beside her was Colonel Everard singing, and these words reached me—

> "'I could not love thee, dear, so much,
> Loved I not honour more.'

Then I felt it was not for me to be listening, so I crept into bed again; I felt quite happy about them, and quite sure that he was not going away.

"The next morning I was up with the lark almost, and I dressed myself as quickly as possible, that I

might find some of those roses, of which Mrs. Thistledown had spoken, in the early summer morning. But as I went down the gallery on tiptoe, fearful of waking the rest of the sleeping household, it seemed to me as if last night's dream and last night's song had never left off, but were going on still; for I heard quick wheels rolling up to the entrance, and there, before me, partly hidden by the curtain in the gallery window, stood those two. They did not see me, and I stood spellbound.

"There are two pictures that were painted years and years after that window-picture had been painted on my young mind, which, nevertheless, always recall it—one is 'The Huguenot,' the other is 'The Black Brunswicker'—both by the same artist.

"Before I could move or let them know that I was only a few yards from them, I could hear him, in that early-morning stillness, say: 'Sweetheart, we must remember the old song; there is something higher than our love which must be obeyed.'

"And then, my dears, she raised her face from his breast, and they solemnly kissed one another; and as he put the soft, golden hair away from her sad eyes, he said: 'When I come back to you, let me see you in this dear brown satin gown that I saw you in first, and that I love for your dear sake.'

"She spoke no word; and as they moved from the window, I crouched down behind a large oak chest, which they would not pass on their way to the staircase; and as they went downstairs, I peeped through the balustrade, and saw them going slowly—slowly—together for such a little while. I could scarcely see

where her brown dress left off and his heavy travelling cloak began, and I could fancy they were speaking heart to heart, although there were no words. As soon as they had disappeared, I slipped to the gallery window to look out; and very soon I heard the grit of wheels, and then I saw the post-chaise, with the driver and the traveller in it, wheeling away—away—until it dwindled to a speck, and then at last went quite out of sight. And I saw the tall figure on the terrace-walk below, leaning against a high sculptured vase, waving her handkerchief, until she was obliged to press it to her eyes.

"Then I had no heart to go and find my roses. I went back to my little room, and I shut the door between Miss Belinda's and mine, because I thought she would like to feel quite alone. As for me, I felt that I had heard and seen more than was intended for me, but 'Nobody shall ever know it,' I said to myself, 'it is the secret of the old gallery which I shall faithfully keep' (they are all gone far beyond secrets now).

"Miss Belinda had her breakfast sent to her in her room that morning, and all that I was told then during my happy stay at the Manor Farm was, that Colonel Everard had gone to fight the French.

"The next day Miss Belinda, 'my sweet young friend,' as Mrs. Thistledown used to call her, went away in the stage-coach to her own home; and she wore her brown satin dress to travel in, which good Mrs. Thistledown told me was a little extravagant, she considered.

"Thirty years afterwards, when I had been married for twenty years or more, I heard that my dear mother's friend, Mrs. Thistledown, was failing fast; and I persuaded my good husband to take rooms at the country

inn near the Manor Farm, that I might say good-bye to her, for old sake's sake.

"How like—and how unlike itself the whole place looked! It was June, as it was when I first saw it. Mr. Dysie sat in the pony-chaise whilst I walked up the carriage-drive alone. As I drew near the terrace steps, I could almost fancy that I saw standing by the sculptured vase that tall figure in brown satin, which I had seen there early one summer morning long, long ago. No! it was not fancy, for there stood actually a tall lady in a brown satin dress, evidently some friend of Mrs. Thistledown's staying in the house, who, having heard that I intended calling, was watching for me. She advanced to meet me; and then, as I—always small, my dears—went up the terrace steps, she bent from the top step to kiss me, saying just these two words—'Little Ann!' and I, looking up into the face that was shaded with silver now instead of gold, murmured, 'Miss Belinda!' In the next moment I had glanced at her left hand, where there was no wedding-ring—only a ring of dark-brown hair, with a diamond forget-me-not on it. And whether it was the feelings that were stirred by seeing the old place again, together with the thought of Mrs. Thistledown's going away, that were too much for me, I don't exactly know—for we *cannot* always account for everything, though some clever people pretend they can!—but anyhow, whatever it was that did it, then and there, although I had not seen Miss Belinda for thirty years, and then only for one day, I clung to her with a great sob, and said: 'Then, after all, you never married him?'

"'No,' she said, as calmly as he would have said it

himself. 'It was at Waterloo; did you never hear? He came out of the fighting unhurt, but he went back to carry away one of his men, who was wounded—and it was a stray shot. . . . He fell doing his duty, and more than his duty.'

"When I was sufficiently composed, she took me indoor to see dear Mrs. Thistledown, who looked extremely comfortable in her large four-post bedstead, and she had on a very becoming lace night-cap; altogether, I am afraid, she struck me as being a very matter-of-fact piece of the old Manor Farm, and by no means fading away as I had been told. She lived, my dears, for some years after that day, and a very peaceful old age it was. When I was alone with her that afternoon, she said to me mysteriously: 'Dear Belinda is everything to me! I only regret one thing for her—that she never married; and she is a little fanciful, as some unmarried women are, and never will wear anything but brown satin, except in the evening. She had a little romance years ago; I don't suppose you can remember? No, you were too young at that time to know anything about Colonel Everard and Belinda'—Then I got up and kissed her, and said I must not keep my husband waiting any longer; for it seemed to me almost profanity to talk of their sweet, sad story in that light way. As I went down the gallery, I should scarcely have been surprised to see them in the deep window recess even then, for it was all just the same, and the very sight of the old-fashioned piano brought back that old-world air, with the words—

"'I could not love thee, dear, so much,
Loved I not honour more.'

"Miss Belinda was waiting for me on the terrace; and she asked me, as we walked down to the gates, whether I could remember well that evening of my arrival long ago. Remember it!—ah! could I not, indeed! And then I told her of my dream, and how I started up at the sound of the old song; but I did not tell her how I had been an unwilling witness of their leave-taking the next morning, for, to my mind, *that* was always like some sacred ceremony into which I had unintentionally been thrust.

"Before we parted she took the ring from her finger and showed me the motto, or posy, inside:—

"'I could not love thee, dear, so much,
Loved I not honour more.'

"And from her deathbed, four years afterwards, my dears, she sent it to me. No, you need not look for it on my hand, Vi; I could not wear it; that, also, would have seemed a sort of profanation. It is put away with many other treasures, in memory of one of the greatest blessings—the blessing of having known, of having seen, although only for a few short summer hours, a man who placed first and foremost *doing the right thing*, and in memory also of the loving heart that was faithful unto her life's end."

A long silence reigned in Mrs. Dysie's drawing-room.

"Such things never happen now," said Violet, with a sigh. "There are no Colonel Everards now."

"There may be," said Hester, glancing towards the sofa, where Reginald lay, to all appearance sleeping;

for was he not Redge? and did she not believe in untold possibilities for him?

"Yes, men may be quite as brave every day," said Mrs. Dysie, "but none may be braver than Colonel Everard."

Here Reginald rose, saying it was time for him to go home to dinner; and, with a kindly good-bye kiss to the dear old lady, he left them all without another word.

"The cap fits! the cap fits!" whispered Mrs. Dysie to herself.

And as Violet and Hester went home together in the twilight of the lengthening spring day, Violet said again mournfully, "*We* never meet with people like Colonel Everard and Miss Belinda. Mrs. Dysie must have lived in a far more interesting time, more like an interesting book; everything is so matter-of-fact now."

"Is it?" said Hester indifferently, far too much absorbed in thinking how Reginald could best develop into a Colonel Everard to be able to lose herself in vain dreams and longings after the fading images and pictures of a long-ago time, which, only as it tells upon the present is of any avail now. Some individual memories are put away as dried rose-leaves, kept for their sweetness; whilst others, like old wine, are good to invigorate the lives that come after.

Reginald, on his way home, was thinking that to be held as the best and the bravest of men was, after all, something worth striving for; and that to be it, without caring how he was held in other people's estimation, was higher still, no doubt; and perhaps, after all, it would be rather strong-minded on his part if he were to insist to himself—even as little Hester insisted to

herself—that he must begin a regular plan of work; that the idle holiday of his life must now be over; that perhaps it would be well for him to close with the Professor's offer, accept the secretaryship, and begin a regular course of study to prepare him for a still wider field in the world of politics. For he was not without his dreams of offering himself one of these days as member for the borough of Wearmouth, only that had always looked to him as almost too vast a field for his energies to cope with—not too vast for his power; but then, in order to work the full power of mind and body properly, energies must certainly work as well; and his energies had been asleep for a long while.

Somehow, all sorts of new thoughts seemed to be waking up in him now. Mrs. Dysie's story had stirred him strangely; but words from Hester now and then stirred him still more; they so often followed closely upon a look or a word from Dorothy that had gone before, and which was always, in spite of his perverseness, most forcible of all persuasions. Well, he would eat humble pie, then; he would bide his opportunity for telling the Professor that he had thought better of accepting that secretaryship. This was the summing-up of his meditations, as he turned into his own gates.

Joss was just passing by on his way home; a nod and a salutation were exchanged.

And Joss thought to himself, as he trudged along over the moor towards the Chine, and felt the fresh salt breeze on his face: "He's going home to those rare books of his; if I might just hold one in my hand, it would be something."

But he had Miss Tracy's little dog-eared Freeman's

History to spell over at home, if his mother would let him have the time without talking to him. But how could she, when he had been away from her all day? and he had not the heart to disappoint her in any way, when he saw his tea set out with all her tenderest thought and care. He went into his room for a good wash, which often calms and soothes a vexed spirit; and when he came back and sat down to the bread and radishes and tea, of which Hester now knew the bitter taste, he stretched out a hand to his mother, as she asked him fondly if the work was hard—if he was tired—if Mr. Treherne had spoken to him.

He replied that Mr. Treherne had said good morning and good evening to him, and that the work had only been sweeping and weeding all day. But, try as he might, he could not shut out the thought of that library of books; it seemed to haunt him. Moreover, his last hour's work had been outside the very window of that room; and the western sun, which had streamed through Mrs. Dysie's dining-room window on to her cheery tea-table, had touched those books in red and bronze and white bindings with tongues of fire; and whilst he swept mechanically, they seemed to say, "Come and see what we can tell you—all that you long to know. Treasures like these are not only for Mr. Treherne, but for you, and for every one."

So that it was rather difficult to enter into his mother's mood entirely, but he did try hard; and when she sat darning his socks after tea, and asked him for some music, he fetched his violin at once. Perhaps he was tired, for the music would not soar up, unbidden, as it were, as it did generally; he could not call out the

right harmonies—it all sounded out of tune to his fine ear, because he was out of tune himself. His mother detected it all at last; and, laying a hand on his shoulder, said, "Let it rest a bit; it will come right then."

But he knew it was his own unresting, unrested spirit that was in the instrument; he knew that his longing for a fuller education—for books, was a wilder yearning that night even than it had ever been before, and that it was struggling with the inevitable facts of his everyday existence—of his newly-undertaken work.

After his mother had gone to bed, he was out on the shore for a long time trying to learn patience under the great star-studded sky, as many a mighty man, ages before Joss Compton, has done, and *will* do in the ages yet to come. And perhaps, at last, the "Amen" which Hester had heard, sounded to him also in the reiterated note of the waves; but this he knew, in his heart of hearts, that his vision of books would never fade away—that, on the contrary, he would see it more and more clearly. For so it is with all our best and highest dreams, until we crush them wilfully,—they become part of our life, to be fulfilled here or hereafter.

Strange that what he craved for Reginald and Hester had enough of and to spare. Moreover they could have dispensed with it all, and given it all to him, so far as their love for it was concerned. But even then he could not have used the gift. No; the gift was theirs, to be so used by them as to be imparted in such shape as he too could use and profit by.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE DINNER-PARTY.

THERE was to be a small dinner-party at Hengisthorne on the day following the discovery of the burnt wheat; what Hester called "the scientific dinner," as it was given especially in honour of the Professor, and two or three kindred spirits had been invited on his account. He had conjured Violet and Hester to keep the matter of his discovery a profound secret, as he intended to reveal it to the assembled company after dinner in a burst of enthusiasm and pride, following upon a gradual lead up to the subject. None but himself knew how his dearest dreams were so near fulfilment—none but those other men of science would understand the perfection of all things which seems to be accomplished when a pet theory is proved demonstrably. His spirits at breakfast-time were so strangely hilarious as to be really quite oppressive; so much so that, as the worthy man went off to the library after breakfast, humming some tune with little or no melody in it except for himself, Mrs. Tracy was heard to say with a sigh of relief that it was a great comfort Dr. Bonus had to finish his lecture for the next day, which would keep him quiet all the morning.

"It is papa's fault, for asking a professor to come and spend his holidays with us," observed Hester, as her father escaped by the window to join Pat and Kitty in a romp on the lawn. Once Hester almost thought of following Dr. Bonus into the library, and of suggesting to him that it might be as well not to build too much upon his treasure of burnt wheat, but in that more merciful moment she descried Reginald coming in at the gate, and she relented no longer; for the sight of him recalled, in a vivid flash of thought, all the Professor's merciless satires and sarcasms at his expense and behind his back. Besides, after all, was it not only a joke on her part?

Reginald had come over for some tennis, feeling wonderfully virtuous because he had made a resolution —not yet developed in any way certainly, but he felt that it was something gained to have made it. "Where was Dorothy?"

Dorothy was in the store-room preparing dessert, and as the store-room had a window into the shrubbery which he knew to be open, he hurried off thither; but Hester, under the cedar, called him back. He stopped, without retracing his steps, and she hurried up to him.

"Does Joss like his work, Redge, do you think?" she asked.

"I 'm sure I don't know. I haven't asked him," was the answer. "I expect he likes what brings him in fourteen shillings a week—more than most gardeners' boys get."

He went on in the direction of the store-room window, and Hester, disappointed, followed him slowly.

It was a sort of life between two lives that Hester was living. There was a waking-up going on, and that waking-up was attended with many painful little processes.

She had not forgotten the "Pilgrims"—far from it, she was not one ever likely to forget. Neither did she forget her self-imposed task; she had worked at it that very morning before breakfast. Neither did she forget that she was bound to take dry bread and milkless tea for a week—only it was not always pleasant to remember. And sometimes she seemed to be working it all out by herself, for other people very often had other and more important things to think about when she wanted to bring forward her things. Thoughtfulness was not natural to her; impulse was very easy. Mistakes, she thought, were more natural to her than anything else, and so was fun; but there was a depth below, of which perhaps Dorothy and Reginald knew more than any one else, which Hester herself did not believe in, but which she would have given a great deal for her father to believe in.

"You had better come to dinner too, this evening," suggested Hester, sauntering through the shrubbery to the store-room window, where Reginald stood leaning against the climbing wistaria, and Dorothy sat on the window-sill, but hearing Hester's approaching voice she moved quickly away to give some finishing touches to her glass dishes of preserved fruits.

"What! come to dine with all these learned men and strong-minded women? No, thank you! Why, Dorothy herself only told me a few minutes ago that she was glad I was not coming." But Dorothy, with a

reproachful look, reminded him that she had given her reasons for saying so, which were—that she was doomed to be taken in to dinner by old Dr. Maynard, F.R.S., F.G.S., and doomed also to have the Professor on her other side.

Just then Mr. Tracy came up to them, with Kitty on his shoulder, and Pat hanging on to the skirts of his coat, armed with a long hazel switch, and urging "Jumbo" to "come up." Dorothy and Reginald could have wished that the privacy of the store-room window were not so universally public that morning. However, Mr. Tracy's first words dispelled all discontent. "Reginald," he said, "we have just had a great disappointment for this evening. Our good friend Maynard cannot come. Will you take his place?"

Reginald protested that he could not undertake to do so in any but a strictly literal form, as he accepted the invitation coolly and calmly—thinking, "If I can buttonhole the Professor after dinner, it will be a splendid opportunity to tell him that I *will* accept the secretaryship;" and Dorothy, with blushing cheeks, popped a dried cherry into two wide bird-like open mouths at the window, as she thought how fortune had changed the day for her; and Hester ejaculated *sotto voce*—

"I *am* glad, because now he will see the fun—and such glorious fun!"

But the fun of it was too much for Hester to keep to herself throughout the day. Violet *must* be told. So out in the garden that afternoon, under the cedar, she confided to Violet the shape which her revenge upon the Professor, for Redge's sake, had taken. Wholly

unconscious were they both that up in the tree above them was something larger than a squirrel—a little being who was more fully bent upon mischief than Hester herself even—perched there as still as a mouse, in hopes that nobody would come and look for him there, "'Cos he didn't want to go for a walk."

Peering down through the branches he saw Hester draw from her pocket, with the words, "Look here, Vi," something which very nearly made him betray his hiding-place—a handful of the sorely coveted burnt wheat.

"O Hess," exclaimed Violet, "some of the Professor's precious wheat."

"But it *isn't* his at all; and it *isn't* precious." Here Hester went into a paroxysm of laughter. "It all came out of the Ravensleigh stables, was roasted over the Hengisthorne nursery fire, and buried directly afterwards by me on the encampment. I showed him the exact spot where to find it."

Then something was said about "Redge," which the eager little listener could not hear; but he distinctly heard the next words from Hester, "And now, I dare say, he is poring over his precious burnt wheat in the study, little thinking that it has nothing whatever to do with the ancient Britons, but a great deal to do with Redge's horses."

Pat did not wait to hear Violet's earnest protestation that Hester "ought not;" that she "ought to tell him." All that he thought of was that he could get that burnt wheat now for his dear dray-horse from the Professor, for if it was not of any good to him now, he would go at once and ask him to give it him.

There was a sliding sound on the other side of the tree, and then a plunge into the bushes, which made both girls start, and exclaim, "What was that?" but squirrels and rabbits were common on the Hengisthorne grounds, and Pat was well on his way to the library, where sat the Professor calmly enjoying his triumph in prospect. Manuscripts of his first completed lecture lay on the writing-table beside him, and the precious wheat was in a little tray in front of him, that he might feast his eyes thereon.

His reverie was rudely disturbed by the door bursting open suddenly, and a little sprite, with staring blue eyes and shrill voice, springing on to him, and saying—

"Please give me your burnt wheat, Mr. Professor, for my dray-horse, who 's ill. 'Cos it 's stupid stuff; it 's out of Redge's stables, and Hess burned it over the nursery fire. She did, really! and then she buried it, for you to find it, for fun. She did really!" he added gravely, nodding his head.

The Professor stood Pat down upon his feet, and faced him calmly and silently—for he was a philosopher.

"Please *do*, Mr. Professor," began Pat, again waxing impatient, not being a philosopher. "*Do* give it to me, 'cos my horse is ill, and would like it so; and Hess says it 's all Redge's, and not a bit of it ancient Britons'."

Then the long pipe was put down on the table and the quiet question asked, "And why is it all Redge's?"

"'Cos he gave it her, I s'pose," was the prompt reply. "She and Redge did it, I s'pose."

Then the philosopher, in the still white heat of his anger, was unjust—not to the little informer, who, much

to his disappointment, was not rewarded by having the wheat given to him then and there, but was told that his horse must wait—perhaps to-morrow he should have it; and so Pat retired disconsolate, to run into nurse's clutches, who was waiting for him outside with Kitty.

But as soon as the boy was gone, the Professor drew a sheet of note-paper towards him, and hastily wrote off a note to his friend the M.P., who was so much in need of a secretary, stating that the young man in question had proved himself unfit for any serious duties in life just yet; in fact, to sum up the case, he was too young. Then he took up his pipe again, and pushed the little tray of burnt wheat further from him. It was to have been discussed this evening after dinner, but now he should say nothing about it. As to the Wearmouth lecture to-morrow, all the zest seemed to have gone out of it, for now he would have to omit that glorious "Eureka" finale, which would be just leaving the dry bones without the spirit; would leave only guesses and probabilities, and therefore would, in the minds of the greater part of his audience, leave, he well knew, only their own convictions, against which he fought—convictions of a battlefield but no settlement; convictions that his statements about race and blood were undemonstrable now as they had ever been, for where was the ghost of a proof?

He felt little doubt that Pat's story was true, for the little lad was generally accurate, and sharp as a needle. He would take his favourite Hester aside to-morrow and question her. As to Reginald, he could believe it of him directly, for had he not himself been a young

man once upon a time, and, in his college days, the leader in many practical jokes! Unfortunately, this did not make him in the slightest degree more lenient towards Reginald now; on the contrary, he repeated continually, between his puffs, "insufferable!" "unpardonable!" and "poor dear Primula!" For, in the first flush of his joyful discovery, he had written off at once to the little companion of all his joys; and when he thought of what that poor little Primula's distress would be on hearing of the downfall of his dearest hopes—when he thought of *that*, the good Professor had once more to remove his pipe, as he cleared his throat and blew his nose, for he was suddenly afflicted with a choky sensation, and there was a mistiness in his eyes which veiled the wheat from him, and showed him only his little daughter's wistful face more clearly.

When Reginald went to his mother's room to say good-bye to her before going up to dine at Hengisthorne, he said: "I am going to tell old Bonus this evening, mother, that I will accept the secretaryship he mentioned to me."

"My dear boy! will you really?—such close work whilst Parliament is sitting!"

"Well, I must expect close work if I am ever in Parliament, and you have often said that you hope to see me there one day; and this will give me my first insight into political life. Anyhow, I mean to take it, so it's useless to say anything more against it."

He stooped and kissed her; but she, laying her novel down in her lap and clasping her little fat hands upon it, said fretfully, "What *has* made you so decided and stern all at once?"

"Time that I was decided, I should think," he said, with a half laugh; "what has done it? An old, old story, partly; and that little witch, Hester, has had something to do with it too."

"Absurd!" murmured his mother again, "to be influenced by a child."

"I never consider Hester exactly as a child," he replied; "I look upon her as a dearly-beloved playmate who has an untold influence upon me; and, even supposing that she were a child, I think a child's influence may be all-powerful sometimes."

"I'm only afraid of your overworking yourself, dear boy," sighed his mother, taking up her book again.

But that was too good a joke even for Reginald himself to accept seriously. "Ask Mr. Tracy what he thinks about that," he said with a laugh, at the door.

"Mr. Tracy has never done you justice," was his mother's answer. But he was gone.

Violet and Hester went up to the nursery regions before the guests arrived that evening; Violet much distressed by Hester's declaring that she would not say a word about her trick before to-morrow.

"But he will be talking about it to every one this evening!" said Violet in consternation; "and papa will be so dreadfully angry when he hears all about it—though he does think the Professor is crazy about burnt wheat."

But Hester, if she had felt like "telling" early in the day, felt very much the reverse now; her spirits had been rising ever since she told Violet, in proportion to poor Violet's distress and imaginary fears. The

chances are that, if Violet's opposition had been less, Hester's prudence would have been greater, and she might have revealed the secret to Dr. Bonus before the evening, but the spirit of mischief was in full swing now.

"Dinner's up, Miss Violet; if you and Miss Hess want to see the company go in to dinner, now's your time," announced nurse.

The two girls crept cautiously to the banisters and peeped over.

"Poor papa!" said Hester, in such a loud whisper that Violet hastily put her hand over her mouth, which, however, Hester soon dismissed with a back-hander, and went on: "Poor papa! he's got to take in that dreadful Mrs. Suffrage; I heard him say she was a regular Blue, the other day; and she's dressed like an ancient Greek—like one of our mythology pictures, isn't she? And there goes her husband, poor meek gentleman! with nice, kind Mrs. Dawson. Isn't she smiling, and trying to make the best of him? He always has a cold, you know, and talks of 'the bood shidig, ad dot the sud.' Redge takes him off splendidly. Here comes Mr. Dawson, who pretends he cares for the Professor's bones; but he's much too jolly really to care for anything so dreadfully dry; he'll talk about horses and fishing with Redge for hours together. Ah! he must have been disappointed at not having his friend Dorothy; poor Mr. Dawson! Do you see who he has to take in instead?—Mrs. Suffrage's friend, Miss Ballote, and she will talk to him all dinner-time about women who ought to be doctors, and women who ought to be in Parliament; I shouldn't think she had brushed her hair for a month. Goodness

gracious! how she scowls and growls. And here comes mamma with Dr. Sawbon; he and his wife are what Redge calls the fossillest of fossils. Do look at Mrs. Sawbon and the Professor; don't they look like 'the gryphon' and 'the mock-turtle' exactly? What a time they all take to go in! some have such long trains. Blanche Dawson; I forgot she was coming. How pretty she looks; of course *she* has the Reverend Frederic Fergusson to take her in, because they are engaged. Mamma said it was very awkward to arrange. He is not speaking one word; and, O you bad Blanche! she actually has the cheek to look up for us. She knew we should be here. Good-bye, my dear; we shall have all the fun, and you will have all the long, tiresome dinner. One more couple, though; and they are sure to look up. Yes, here they come—our two—our Redge and our Dorothy. Doesn't he look handsome? and don't they make a good contrast to Dr. Bonus and Mrs. Sawbon? They are sure to enjoy themselves; and so will Blanche and Mr. Fergusson, because *he* doesn't care for bones any more than Redge does; but everybody else has been invited to enjoy the Professor, and I hope they will—that's all!"

Here the children came scampering upstairs; a flutter of white sailor suit, and white frock and blue ribbons, eating preserved ginger as they came.

"The Professor's an old stupid," announced Pat, "he doesn't talk to anybody;" for which irreverent remark he was sternly rebuked by Hannah.

"Don't you know," she said severely, "that those very clever gentlemen have so very much in their heads that they *can't* talk? It's as much as they can do to think about it."

Certainly the Professor was a disappointment that evening. Instead of being the shining light at the dinner-table that he was meant to be by his host and hostess, and expected to be by every one else, he was absent, taciturn, moody. So much so, that when the ladies came into the drawing-room, Mrs. Tracy, in a tone of considerable distress, said to her assembled guests: "I am *quite* disappointed in Professor Bonus this evening; I don't think he can be well. I am afraid, Mrs. Suffrage, that you must have found him a most uninteresting neighbour!" Here Hester was aroused and Violet startled in the midst of their laughing and talking on the ottoman with Blanche Dawson, for their mother's words suggested the alarming idea to both—What if he had found out and was going to expose the culprit before everybody that evening! However, Hester reassured herself by having a tolerably true estimate of Dr. Bonus's benevolence and generosity with one exception, and that was, wherever Reginald was concerned. Still she listened somewhat anxiously for more words on the subject.

"He was certainly self-absorbed," replied Mrs. Suffrage, elevating her eyebrows. "I tried to draw him on his favourite subject, that of his to-morrow's lecture, but he was really almost rude in his manner; for, instead of answering my question, he asked whether it was true that I had joined the Blue Ribbon Army. Later on I made one more attempt, and he then said, most grimly, that he was not sure if he should deliver the lecture at all; circumstances had arisen which might make it impossible." Here Hester's excitement waxed intense.

"Extraordinary!" observed Mrs. Tracy meditatively; "really these very clever people are a little trying in their eccentricities occasionally. We have arranged everything for this wonderful lecture; dinner-tea instead of dinner—an arrangement which Mr. Tracy cannot endure, but as it suited the Professor better, he gave up his own wishes at once with his usual cheerfulness, and now, if this tiresome man has changed his mind after all! Why, you know, one always has to order dinner two days beforehand here, but of course men cannot be expected to take that into consideration. Dear Mrs. Dawson, come nearer to the fire. The evenings are chilly; so we have fires, and we keep the further window open."

Then the conversation became general, and the ladies arranged themselves cosily and comfortably; or rather, they were so arranged by Dorothy's charming consideration and pleasantness. Dorothy was more than usually beaming that evening, for she and Reginald, over their soup and fish, and amid the general hum of conversation round the dinner-table, had made their peace fully and satisfactorily, which had been begun at the store-room window that morning. And then he had made her more than happy by informing her that he intended to apply for the secretaryship before he left the house that evening.

"I mean it," he said; "don't make me feel still more what a sinner I am by looking as if you could not believe in my doing anything so virtuous. I am going to turn over a new leaf, like Hester."

Then foolish, soft-hearted Dorothy, in a glow of serene satisfaction, and smitten with compassion lest

her knight should be slain by excess of work, said gently, when she raised her eyes at last: "It will not be *very* hard work, will it?—it won't be *very* bad for you after your out-of-door life, will it?"

And Reginald felt then that he would have worked like a galley slave for the sake of her sweet pity; which perhaps was not the highest motive he might have had for such laudable zeal, but we climb up to the highest only by degrees—never at one bound, and sometimes the rebuffs and the pull-backs that we meet with in such ascending efforts make it a veritable Hill Difficulty. Happy those who have a House Beautiful on their way, where they can get rest and refreshment!

Little did Hester dream that her hand was to give Reginald his first rebuff, after he had gathered up his strength for a fresh start.

CHAPTER X.

THE SLOUGH OF DESPOND.

WHEN the gentlemen left the dining-room, the Professor was detained by Reginald, who asked him if he would give him a minute or two, as he had something to say to him.

And when the drawing-room party was increased by those two gentlemen, certainly no one was the gainer. Reginald, with a thunder-cloud on his brow, walked up to the open window and stepped straight out into the garden, where Hester could hear him, above Blanche Dawson's singing, walking up and down on the gravel; whilst the Professor stood by the fire-place, moody and abstracted, talking to nobody, evidently buried in thought.

For Reginald had said to him: "Dr. Bonus, I am willing to accept the secretaryship if it is still to be had."

And the Professor had replied sharply: "It is *not* to be had; I wrote to my friend this afternoon, and told him that I considered you too young for it." Upon which Reginald, astonished and indignant, asked him why he had ever offered it to him?

"Circumstances alter cases," the Professor had

replied; upon which Reginald said he considered himself justified in inquiring into the circumstances, but Dr. Bonus, with the stiffest of bows, dismissed the subject by saying that he could not discuss the matter then.

So Reginald had gone out into the garden, trying to swallow his wrath, or at least to bottle it up until he might let it fly, when all the guests had gone. For, of course, when one goes out to dinner, one *must* learn to swallow any wrath that may be roused, although it is often very indigestible; but for appearance' sake, if for nothing else, one must be polite to one's host and hostess.

Presently Hester, who had been marvelling as to what Reginald was up to now, stepped out into the garden, and said softly: "Redge! they want you to come in and sing; what are you doing? Papa thinks you have gone out to smoke, but I told him I was sure you hadn't."

"Does he really think that of me?" said poor Reginald bitterly; "does he think I should leave the society of ladies for my own pleasure, and then go amongst them again this evening, reeking of smoke? Every man's hand is against me, but yours, Hess, and Dorothy's. No! I came out here, because that old Bonus has fooled me to the very top of my bent!" Poor Reginald was tragic in this tirade perhaps, but it was almost a case of tragedy with him. At any rate Hester felt it to be so, although she knew nothing of the circumstances.

"Again!" she said, clenching her fists; but a voice from the drawing-room window, between the curtains,

cried: "Are you not coming in to sing?" But the words were not repeated, and the speaker, Dorothy, stepped out on to the gravel path. She looked up at him wonderingly and doubtfully, and he said—

"I *can't* sing to-night; I couldn't if I were paid for it. I should break down if I attempted it. That old fool has spoilt everything. What's the use of my ever trying to do anything? But I'll have it out with him to-night when the others are gone. It may be a stand-up fight between him and me; your father shall be umpire."

These were not cheerful tidings for poor Dorothy, and of course Hester heard all, as she was standing out there on the gravel beside him. And she thought something must have gone very wrong with Dr. Bonus; something must have crossed him, surely—but what?

"Why does he say nothing about his lecture?" she whispered to Reginald, catching hold of him as he followed Dorothy into the drawing-room.

But of this Reginald knew nothing, and cared still less. He only knew that the first rung of the ladder of endeavour which he had set up had been ruthlessly broken. Of course he was perfectly agreeable to every one in the drawing-room behaving as if the Professor were not there; and indeed he might have been miles away for all that was heard of him. Hester thought it was very wonderful that way which "drawing-room people" have of wearing a smiling face when perhaps they are eating their hearts out with vexation all the time. She was quite sure that she should never be able to attain to that. Why, even now *she* could hear that Dorothy's fingers were not so steady as usual on

the notes of the piano; there was a flutter in them which Hester well knew meant more than nervousness, a flutter which in some way was connected with the flush of pain that had risen at Reginald's startling words. As for Reginald himself, could not Hester see, as she watched him looking over an album of photographs with Blanche Dawson, that, in spite of his jests and his rattling conversation, there was a decided knit in his brow; and was it her fancy that there was a hard *something* in his voice,—a sort of pain which she had never detected there before? What did it all mean? Of this she was certain, that the Professor had been saying something worse than usual to Reginald. She looked at him standing up against the chimney-piece, "stiff and stark like an old mummy," she said to herself; and as she looked at him she felt as if he were the author of all evil to those she loved best, and as if she could not remain in the same room with him any longer. So she slipped out of the drawing-room unseen and unheard amongst the Babel of tongues, the strains of Chopin's Grande Valse, and that general pre-occupation caused by every one trying to be their pleasantest, excepting, and in spite of, that one tremendous wet blanket—Professor Bonus.

In this way Hester, the unconscious cause of the very pain she deprecated, and of still more pain to come, vanished from the drawing-room, and crept upstairs to bed, where she slept so soundly that she did not even wake when Violet came up. But her dreams were troubled by haunting visions of poor Reginald as he had looked when he stood on the gravel outside the drawing-room window that evening, speaking to

Dorothy; and she dreamt that he was being sent to school again as a little boy, and the schoolmaster was the Professor, and Reginald would learn nothing but two lines, which he kept saying over and over again, and they were the lines from Colonel Everard's song:—

> "I could not love thee, dear, so much,
> Loved I not honour more."

And whilst Hester was dreaming that dream, her father, and Dr. Bonus, and Reginald, were actually downstairs in the drawing-room alone; for the last of the other guests had gone, and Mrs. Tracy and Dorothy had also gone away too upstairs; and when Mr. Tracy held out his hand to Reginald by way of saying, "It is quite time to go now," Reginald had drawn himself up to his full height, and said, "Before I go to-night, I wish Dr. Bonus to explain himself with regard to something he has said to me."

If these had been the days of duelling, the poor Professor would have stood a bad chance of escape against such determination.

Mr. Tracy quietly asked Reginald to explain *himself*, whilst Dr. Bonus was silent.

"After dinner this evening," began Reginald, "I told Dr. Bonus that I was quite willing to accept the secretaryship if it were still at his friend's disposal. His reply was that he had only this afternoon written to tell his friend that he considers me unfit for it—*this* in the face of his having assured me only last week that I might have at least a week to consider it."

It was now time for Mr. Tracy to turn to the Professor for an explanation.

He gave it. For, being thus called upon, he did not wait to "commune with Hester" alone upon the subject before speaking of it to any one else, which had been his original intention.

He told how she had shown him where to find the burnt wheat, and how little Pat had solemnly assured him that it had all come from the Ravensleigh stables; that it had been in fact a concocted trick, arranged between Reginald and Hester.

"No idea of the kind could have entered the child's head as a fabrication," concluded the Professor, "for there was the stamp of ingenuous truth on every word he said. Naturally it has so damped my ardour with respect to the lecture that I scarcely know now whether I shall give it. But say nothing about it to my little friend Hester, I beg," he added, earnestly, seeing Mr. Tracy's lips firmly compressed, "for, after all, she is young, and full of spirits!"

"After all," exclaimed Reginald angrily, "she is the only one who is responsible for having done all the mischief, and a great deal more than she knows. How could you imagine that I should have anything to do with such stupid child's play?"

Then was the good Professor, in spite of his own disappointment, truly grieved; and if Hester's one wish had been to make him eat humble pie, she had indeed succeeded, for the sense of his own injustice, and of Reginald's disappointment, was excessively painful.

At that moment Mr. Tracy could only revolve in his mind the best course to pursue with regard to Hester.

"I can scarcely believe," he said, "that she would play such an unkind trick; and certainly I should

never have believed it of this young man," he added, with a smile, laying a hand on Reginald's shoulder, thereby administering unlooked for balm. "She is in bed and asleep now, but the first thing after breakfast I will speak to her. I am most heartily sorry that she should have stooped to anything so beneath contempt —if she has done so; but I cannot help thinking that Master Pat may have done it himself."

"Nay, for surely in that case he would not have failed to appropriate some of the wheat for his dray-horse," argued the Professor; "and I fear that I can remember only too well an unwonted excitement about Hester when she took me to the Barrow that day, and led me on to the exact spot where I found the wheat. Truly I have been gulled."

He tried to make a joke of it, but failed. And as to his two companions, they were far too grave for any laughter.

Mr. Tracy was grave from displeasure and mortification that his honoured guest should have been so treated by a daughter of his. Reginald was grave, not only from disappointment, but because he called to mind how Hester had lingered in the Ravensleigh stables only the other morning after she came down from his studio. She was never allowed to go into their own stables without their father, and he could not suppress a very strong conviction that it was true. For the first time in his life he felt very bitter feelings towards her, as he thought of all that this secretaryship might have led to.

"There is still time," said the Professor kindly. "I will write the first thing to-morrow."

"It takes more than one post to remove a bad impression," said Reginald carelessly; "besides, country posts are fatal to doing anything speedily."

"I will telegraph," urged the Professor.

"Pray don't take the trouble," said Reginald. "I really don't care—it's not as if it were a matter of life and death."

But how much he did care was shown by the fact that he walked about the country very late that night, and did not go home until nearly dawn. And almost the worst of it all was that he should have given any one the slightest reason for suspecting that he was capable of such "child's play," as he called it; and *quite* the worst of it all was, that it was Hester—his little friend Hester—who had thrown him in his first earnest endeavour to turn over that new leaf, from which he had lazily shrunk until now.

The Professor did telegraph, but it was too late. When his letter had arrived, which said, "Treherne is decidedly too young," a most promising individual happened to be on the spot, and being a relation, and apparently well fitted in every way for the post, he stepped into it at once.

. . . . . .

There are times when we can, some of us, feel that something is going to happen; just as, before a thunderstorm, some sensitive organisations can feel the superabundant electricity which will burst upon us presently. And in much the same way did susceptible Violet feel the next morning, as she had felt the preceding evening, that something was wrong, and she was therefore out of sorts and nervous. Not so Hester, who—although she

knew, from what she had heard last night, that Reginald had been grievously offended, and therefore she was the same—yet woke up in the morning fresh as a lark, and did her work bravely before breakfast, for the sake of that same Reginald, and for the sake of "backbone" generally. Then she proceeded to the dining-room to drink her milkless tea and eat her butterless bread, for the sake of Joss. Nobody noticed her abstinence now, but none the more did poor Hester get accustomed to it. She thought that the copy-book maxim, which said, "Custom commonly makes things easy," was a very false one, and rejoiced that her self-imposed week of such abstinence would soon be over.

There was very little conversation at breakfast that morning; scarcely a word was spoken except by the ever-jovial Pat and Kitty. Dorothy, who had had a walk and a talk in the garden with her father whilst the coffee was brewing, was unusually grave and subdued. Mrs. Tracy was breakfasting in bed, having a bad headache—the Professor's moodiness of the night before, together with the advanced ideas of Mrs. Suffrage and Miss Ballote, having been perhaps too much for her. The Professor himself scarcely touched his breakfast; and he fixed his eyes upon Hester so constantly, and for so long a time, and with such a melancholy expression of countenance, that at last she could bear it no longer, and exclaimed in desperation: "What *are* you looking at me so for?"—to which challenge he returned no answer, but the children treated it as a capital joke, and shrieked with laughter; whilst Mr. Tracy put down his newspaper suddenly, and said, in an astonishing tone of rebuke, "Hester!"

Under ordinary circumstances he would have said nothing, but, you see, Hester was in disgrace, although she did not know it, and therefore answered innocently enough: "Yes, papa?"

This led to another silence, broken by the children, who were evidently struck by the contrast in the two last sounds which had disturbed the stillness of the breakfast-table; for Pat, as he stirred his tea and fished up lumps of sugar, repeated in a deep, loud tone, as much like his father's voice as he could make it, "*Hes*ter!" and then, in a much higher, softer key, uttered Hester's answer, "Yes, papa," which of course convulsed Kitty, who repeated it after him, and then attempted a chorus, until Mr. Tracy sharply bade them "Be quiet!"

When breakfast was over, Dorothy lingered with her store-room keys in her hand, and said hesitatingly, looking towards her father and the Professor: "Are we to have dinner to-night as usual, or high-tea at half-past six?" to which the Professor replied: "I intend to give my lecture as arranged yesterday, at half-past seven"—upon which Dorothy hurried away, looking as if she were sorry that she had asked.

Then the little ones skipped away upstairs, followed by Violet; and Hester too was going after them when her father's voice called her back. She stood at the door, waiting to hear what he had to say.

"Come back—I want to speak to you," he said; "and shut the door."

The Professor had already left the room.

Hester went up to her father, and looked in amazement at the stern expression on his face. He was

standing by the mantle-piece, and she in front of him.

"Now tell me, Hester," he began, "what is this story of Pat's, about your having buried some wheat which you burned over the nursery fire, that Dr. Bonus might find it and take it for ancient remains? Is this true?"

The colour rushed into Hester's face, but her eyes did not flinch from looking straight up into those above her.

"It was only in fun," she protested; "but how on earth did Pat find out?"

"Then you really did it?"

"Yes! but only for fun, and because I can't bear him when he says ill-tempered things of Redge, or talks at him whenever he meets him!"

"So, by a most unkind and childish trick, you set yourself up as the judge of a most worthy man; his age alone should have entitled him to more respect, if it had been nothing to you that he is one of your father's oldest friends and his honoured guest. Practical jokes are always more or less disgusting to me, and this one is particularly so—not only because he is my guest, but because it was playing on his most tender and sensitive spot, for it was to him the finding of a great treasure. Besides, no man likes to be made to feel a fool, of which no doubt you were well aware when you did this. I am not exaggerating when I say that he was almost heart-broken yesterday evening. In his simplicity of soul he had suspected no false play; and in his generosity and his great affection for you he would not have you blamed. But I could not let it

pass, although I could scarcely believe it of you. I wonder when you will grow older and more sensible, Hester; it really makes one feel almost in despair!"

Poor Hester! poor mollusc! She certainly did deserve sharp rebuke; but not *this*, she felt—not *this* from her father. Had she not been really trying to turn over that new leaf? Had she not been fighting for the development of backbone; and was not the taste of tea without milk still bitter in her mouth? "But it was meant for *fun*, papa," she murmured, half choked; "only fun, and a little anger too, for Redge's sake."

"Stuff and nonsense!" retorted her father angrily; "and as to Redge, much good have you done him! for that little simpleton, Pat, told Dr. Bonus that Reginald was in it; that you and he together had played him the trick. Naturally, Dr. Bonus was extremely angry, and, in the heat of the moment wrote off to his friend and advised him not to keep the secretaryship—of which he had spoken—any longer vacant for Reginald, as he did not consider him fit for it. Last night Reginald told Dr. Bonus that he had decided upon accepting it; but the deed had been done then. *Then* your charming joke came to light; and Reginald has to thank you for having lost a splendid chance." [Mr. Tracy did *not* say to Hester what he had said to his wife on that subject, which was, that "Bonus was an old fool to write that letter at all."] "I will say no more now," he concluded—indeed he had said enough—"but there must be an apology from you, Hester, to Dr. Bonus."

He walked straight out of the room without looking at her again. She stood where she had been standing

all the time, only she was almost stunned now. Then *that* was what Redge had meant last night: he had asked for it, been refused, and had waited to hear the explanation until every one else had gone. And that was why Dorothy had looked sad and grave. Apologise to the Professor! when there was this cruel injury done to Reginald which no apology could set right! Where did this friend of the Professor live, she wondered? She would go straight to him at once, and tell him that it was all her fault! Only, in order to do this, she must get his address from the Professor, and so, perhaps, it would be as well to apologise. Of course she must apologise, because her father had said so. There was a great ache in her heart, and she felt very cold and her head was very hot, and her eyes seemed to burn too; quite dry they were—not a tear in them.

She supposed it would not be good to wish that her father knew how very much she had been longing to leave off being a mollusc. He would never believe it now, unless she could right what was wrong; but she was beginning to think that it was next to impossible to make right what had gone so very wrong. She felt as if all at once she had been turned into a grievous criminal, and the very sky seemed to be darkened, although the sun was shining gloriously. The servant came in to clear away the breakfast, and Hester moved out of the room quickly, and went to the library.

She knocked at the door gently. How she wished that it was Reginald instead of the Professor! for then she would have known exactly what to say, because he was so very dear, whereas the Professor was so very *un*dear to her.

But when she saw him with his lecture manuscripts spread out on the table before him, and his head on his hands, as if it were a hard task now, with all the "Eureka!" gone out of it, her father's words came into her mind, about his being "almost broken-hearted;" although she had her private misgivings, even in the midst of all her distress, that he could not be quite "such a swell" after all, if he could be so very easily taken in.

"Dr. Bonus, I am very sorry," she said, not advancing any further than the door.

"My dear child, say no more about it," he replied, turning round in his chair and holding out his hand, which she was then obliged to come forward and take.

"You know Redge had nothing to do with it," she said stoutly.

"I *do* know, and I have been unjust," he replied simply.

"It was *all* my fault," she said with a great tearless sob; "and where does this gentleman live, who wanted a secretary?"

"Where does he *live*, my dear! where does Mr. Seymour *live!* In Brook Street, Grosvenor Square, No. 26,"—wondering, but little dreaming, why she asked. "I have telegraphed to him to keep the post still open, but I fear I may be too late."

Hester was not going to trust to anything but her own feet and her own voice. It had all been her doing, and now it remained with her to set it right. Until then, she could not look for her father's smile again, nor could she meet Reginald face to face; she only hoped she should not meet him on her way.

"I do a great deal in fun, because I can't help it," she said honestly, looking up into the wise man's studious eyes with her great brown ones, usually so full of life and light, but not now; "but I begin to think that I must give up fun if I mean to grow a backbone. But I forgot; you don't know what that means. Do you know the *Pilgrim's Progress?*" she asked suddenly. Then, when she saw the student's eyes kindle at the very name of the book, she felt that here was *something* they were of one mind about, at any rate. "Joss Compton reads it aloud to me sometimes," she continued; "and I feel this morning as if I had got into the Slough of Despond almost—not quite. There are the Shining Ones, you know."—She gave a little nod with the last words, and said she must go now.

With that she left him; a very different Hester, he thought, from any he had ever seen before; and still more different a few minutes later, when, in her hat and jacket, she walked away down the shrubbery, desperately fearful lest some one should see her and stop her on her way to the station. Through the garden gate she passed, and then she began to run. She ran and ran, faster and faster, as if she had staked her life upon this venture. And as she was running, she was thinking that the Professor's heart did not seem broken at all, but she was quite sure that her own was sorely bruised, if not broken. When had her father ever looked at her or spoken to her as he had on that morning? Who had ever done Redge such a grievous injury as she had done? But they should see how grievously she repented by trying to make all the amends that lay in her power.

And alas! how very small that power proved itself to be, when, on reaching the station, she remembered that she had no money with her, and that what she had at home did not exceed a few shillings, whereas the single ticket alone would be a guinea. Then she did indeed begin to despair. Home she could not and would not go. She turned desolately back towards Angel Chine; down it she went, and, lying under Joss Compton's boat, where she knew she should be alone, she sobbed as if her heart really would break.

It was a rare thing for Hester to cry. To know that she had given pain to others always made her more inclined to cry than anything else. Pain to herself she could easily bear without tears; nay, she could laugh at it, smile bravely through it. But *this*—this that she had done to Redge—*this* that had brought such a stern rebuke from her father, that she felt as if he would never hold her in his arms again, never call her "Hess of the awkward squad" again—what could it be but the end of all things for her? These are Hester's own meditations, remember, not mine. Life had no longer any enjoyment, no more sorrows, no more burdensome school-tasks; all was over now; she should never go home any more. If she could only have got to London and seen Mr. Seymour, and told him how admirably Redge was fitted for the post which she had very nearly prevented his having obtained—not *quite*, for she would have arrived just in time, she felt sure—why, then, there would have been so much atonement; but now she could do nothing, and therefore they should not see her face again, neither at Ravensleigh nor at Hengisthorne.

She could not think of Violet yet; she only thought of Redge and her father, both hurt by her beyond all reparation. As to the Professor, he did not trouble her, for she did not love him; but how would it be to creep away to his home—he was leaving Hengisthorne to-morrow—and to ask him to let her live with him and clever little Primula for a time, that she might, under their skilful tuition, and by the influence of first-rate example, acquire so much more head, that she might not only learn all sorts of knowledge, but might become quite grave and orderly, and so would never go wrong any more—never think of fun any more? Poor Hester! lying there thinking all this through her sobs, down by the side of the old boat, getting, or going to get shortly, far more wisdom than any mere head-knowledge could give her. Knowledge is good, but wisdom is better; the Professor himself would have told her so.

Once she started up, having heard a sound which made her think that some one was coming from the Comptons' cottage; but no—it was all shut up, for Joss was working away with his broom and barrow up at Ravensleigh, and his mother too was out for the day. What Hester had heard was only the starling fluttering in its cage outside the door. Once more she heard it, and this time it screamed, "We're poor fools! poor fools!" Perhaps she might have agreed with the bird had she been a few years older, but just now she thought it was a very poor utterance. "Miserable sinners" would have been nearer the mark with her.

CHAPTER XVI.

IN ANGEL CHINE.

HOURS passed unnoticed by Hester, until she heard a church clock strike one, which brought to her mind the recollection of the 1.25 train for London. If only she could have travelled by it!—if only she could have found Mr. Seymour at home!—nothing in the shape of shyness would have daunted her; he might have been a two-headed giant, and no Jack-the-Giant-Killer would have bearded him in his den with braver determination than Hester, for the sake of Redge. But this want of money was a giant not to be overcome by her unaided strength, until, by an involuntary movement, her fingers caught in her watch-chain, and in that moment the fact that she wore a gold watch suggested the Hester-like idea, Why not sell it at once, and so be enabled to travel up to London? True, it would involve her going through Wearmouth; but everybody would be at luncheon now; nobody would see her—nobody she knew or cared for. Even at home they would be at luncheon, resting in the assurance of her safe return later on. The children would be singing and chattering; her father would be doing all in his power to make amends to the chagrined Professor for

the cruel wrong he had received at her hands—enough to make *him* not trouble his head about her indeed! Dorothy would be wobegone for Reginald's disappointment, and therefore too much vexed with the sister who had caused it to worry over her absence; her mother's head was, no doubt, aching far too much to leave room for anxiety about that Hester who was always in mischief, and never coming to any harm. Faithful Vi might, perhaps, be a little troubled; but then her trouble of mind would be one drop in an ocean of unruffled serenity, so far as Hester was concerned.

So Hester decided that the watch must do it. She dried her last tear, and sternly resolved that no more should come; of course, her eyes were red and swollen —that she could not help. She was going to try to set right a grievous wrong; she was going to save Redge from despair. She was going to show her father what her repentance was. And she was going to further the growth of *backbone*, and so, perhaps, get nearer to that true woman of whom he had spoken in the garden. What ages ago that seemed!—those were days in the Garden of Paradise; these were days of the exile and outcast. Vagabond, indeed, as Reginald called her!—would he ever call her that again, she wondered?

And now she planned her route. She would not go round by the Chine Road, for that was such a very long way; she would climb up the side of the Chine—up the shortest, but the steepest side. She had climbed it once before with Reginald, and he had told her that it was rather a venturesome thing to have attempted; but *now* it was a case of "nothing venture, nothing have."

Up she started, ran from the sea and sands, cleared the little brook, gurgling between the furze, with one hop, skip, and a jump, and began to climb what looked very like the side of a house.

Meanwhile, he for whom she was willing to sell her watch, and travel to the house of a stranger with a petition in his behalf, had not forgiven her, until his mother had asked him at breakfast what Dr. Bonus had said about the secretaryship last night. Then, in his bitter disappointment, he told his mother everything; whereupon she, being his mother, and inconsistent, was very wroth with Hester, and full of regret for the best appointment he could possibly have had! "Such a gentlemanly post it would have been, and one that might have led to so much! That tiresome girl! I cannot think what the Tracys are about not to manage her better. I never did like her so much as Violet, and now——"

But it must be a very flimsy friendship that, from hurt personal feelings, will suffer a friend to be immoderately abused, and now Reginald broke in "Say no more about Hester, mother," he said quickly; "I don't care what she does. She 's one in a thousand; and if she had a thousand faults, and treated me a thousand times worse than she has done, I would *never* hear her abused by any one but myself. All the same," he muttered, "she has played me a trick this time."

However, his mother teased and fidgeted him so much more than it would ever be possible for Hester to do, that he fairly beat a retreat; and, lighting a cigar, he sauntered over the moor to Mrs. Dysie's.

He stood outside her pleasant drawing-room window

in the verandah, smoking, whilst she sat inside, working; not fretting him with questions, but letting him talk on, or be silent, as he liked. "Now that I have lost this," he said, "I don't quite see what I am to do."

"When one door closes another opens," was the reply; "only you must be on the lookout for that open door—don't wait until it is slammed in your face. Would it not be a good thing if you were to take up some course of reading?—to read steadily is never time wasted."

"I know; that's just the very thing I thought of doing."

"Don't *think* about it, but *do* it," was the quick rejoinder. "You see, Redge, you are one of those rather unfortunate men who are not forced to work for their livelihood, and so you will have to make your own work, if you wish to spend your time profitably; for life must be lived; no man worth the name can afford to play it away—and certainly not Reginald Treherne, who has a great prize at stake." The sharp, kind eyes were fixed upon him for a moment—only for a moment. He brushed some ash off his sleeve before he said, with heightened colour, which had risen whilst she was speaking: "I want to talk to you about that boy, Joss Compton. You know all about schools, and about what would be best for a boy of that sort. Hester is so bent upon his education being completed, in order that he might at some future time be, what, according to her, he longs to be—a schoolmaster. Now, if that is the case, it really is a pity that he should have to give all his mind to gardening; and *yet* they want the money, you see. What had I better do?"

That question was a great step for Reginald, and Mrs. Dysie did not fail to see it, and turn it to advantage.

"Do?" she echoed; "what could be better than for you to take him in hand yourself, after his day's work is done? Not every day. Say, every other day; your brains are quite sufficient to help him for a while; *then* send him to —— College."

This led to a very long discussion between the old lady and the young man as to ways and means; and into the middle of it all came Dorothy, to see if Hester were there. But poor Hester's prophetic soul was right, in so far that anxiety on her account was not so seldom aroused that it could not, on occasion, be lulled by fresher and more stirring interests. So now here was Reginald's disappointment to be assuaged; here were his plans and ideas for Joss to be entered into with warm sympathy by helpful Dorothy; and gradually Mrs. Dysie, with a knowing smile, withdrew, and allowed them to talk on and plan on by themselves.

But although they were alone and in Paradise, the little outcast vagabond was not forgotten, for when Reginald did at last say he must be going, he added: "Well! if I ever do anything worth doing for that boy, it will be Hester's doing, not mine."

Little did he think how that friend of his had begun to ascend the Hill Difficulty, for his sake, not only figuratively, but literally; how she had stepped on a big loose stone, which had given way, and her foot with it; and how she lay now, in a heap, on the cliff-side, just above Angel Chine, with a broken or sprained ankle, she did not know which. All she knew was

that for a long time she knew nothing; and therefore she supposed that she had fainted, a weakness of which she had never before been guilty; and by the lengthening shadows on the opposite side of the Chine, she guessed it was nearing the hour of sunset. No chance of London now, and not much chance of home. She began to think of home, because, helpless and solitary, her resolution as to never returning there until she had made amends, was fading away rapidly. Would it not be rather cold to lie out there all night under the stars? She was rather cold already. She raised herself on her elbow, and could see the Comptons' cottage not so very far below her; but what was the good of that?—she could not stir a step. She looked up—the top of the cliff was much further off; she only hoped that nobody would come rushing down upon her, in the same way that she and Vi scrambled down on the day that nurse's umbrella took flight. She sincerely hoped that it was not likely to do so now, for she was powerless to resist it.

If her leg were broken, she wondered whether she might be obliged to have it cut off? She thought that very likely her father, and Reginald too, would forgive her then, especially if she were doomed for the rest of her life to hop about on a wooden leg. Then she began wondering how the old leg would come off and the new leg be put on, until the horror of the thought was almost too much, and she tried to think of something else; but, oh dear! the pain was intense! The dash of the waves, the slow wash back and the sweep forward, sounded more than ever like a monotonous "Amen," over and over again, until she

wished she had never heard it; and at last she could no longer bear the pain, and the solemn silence broken only by that reiterated note, and she screamed out: "Isn't anybody coming?"

A little bird went fluttering away out of a gorse-bush below her, scared by her voice, the only creature that heard her. She waited, listening, for some moments, and then she did a *yödel*, as she had learnt it from Reginald after he had been to Switzerland last year. Manfully she *yödelled*, not once only, but several times. And at last some one did hear her.

Joss Compton had left off work early that afternoon; for Mr. Treherne had come to him, as he stood sweeping in the shrubbery outside the study, once more with the sunlight from the west gilding the books within, and making them shine like gold.

Mr. Treherne had walked into the study, and, leaning out of the window, had said: "You can leave off sweeping now. Leave your work for to-day and go home to tea; then come back again for an hour's reading here with me, if you like."

Joss could not take it all in at first, so Reginald proceeded to explain: "Miss Hester Tracy began reading history to you, but she has asked me to take her place—not because she is tired of it, but because she thinks you know so much more than she does."

"Miss Tracy's very good, I'm sure," said Joss, colouring up.

"She is," said her other friend quietly; "and now I wish you to understand that I am ready to take you in hand every other evening, and we will get in some arithmetic too, and everything else in time. We shall

make a schoolmaster of you yet, only don't you go and be too clever for me."

With those last words Reginald had vanished, for his mother was waiting to take a stroll with him. She would think this arrangement of his very ridiculous, he knew, for which he cared little. For when Reginald *did* make up his mind that a thing was right, and that he would do it, no opposition or ridicule produced the slightest effect upon him.

As for Joss, he could only feel and believe that the angel voices in the Chine had not sung to him in vain. The world looked full of hope as he strode along towards that tiny cottage from which such great trust, such brave patience, and such strong endeavour could issue; for, never mind how small the home is, no large heart or large mind need therefore be cramped. His mother was still out at work, and the starling was silent; but as he put the key in the door a strange cry reached his ears. He started off at once in the direction whence it came, and then, as he leapt across the little stream, he paused to listen once more. Once more that *yödel* rang through the air, and then he distinctly heard the words: "Oh dear, oh dear! is *nobody* coming? Won't *some*body come?"

Up the Chine-side he sprang, over the furze and the tufts of heather, only pausing to cry out: "I am coming. Who is it? Where are you?"

In clear and joyful accents came the answer: "It's me—Hester Tracy!—here!"

There he found her, a very little way further, in the little combe on the side of the Chine, into which she had fallen when she slipped. Her head was almost in

a furze-bush; her hat had gone she did not know where; and it was a very white face that was raised to meet his, although the eyes were brighter than ever as she tried to smile, shaking back the elf-locks: "I've sprained my ankle, or broken my leg, Joss, and it hurts very much. You can't carry me alone—at least you could, because you are so strong; but it makes me sick to think of going up or down, unless there were two to carry me. What will you do?"

"Go straight back to Mr. Treherne," was the prompt answer.

"Oh no! no!" she almost screamed, for a great twinge came at the same time, because she tried to jump up, forgetting. "Isn't there anybody else?"

"Nobody nearer. He is waiting for me, so I know he'll be at home. You must be got away from here as soon as you can, you see, Miss Tracy," he said gently. "You won't mind waiting a little while whilst I run back to Ravensleigh?"

"All alone again!" moaned Hester piteously; then before he could speak again she had resigned herself to her fate in the most practical way, as she added: "Look here, Joss, you will both have to carry me on something, I know, because I don't think I can let this foot of mine dangle, so tell Mr. Treherne to remember the ambulance lectures, and to bring a railway rug and sticks to make a stretcher. He'll understand."

She was left; and oh! what agony was beginning to make itself felt in her ankle! She tried to think of all sorts of things that might distract her mind, and she went back—back—ever so far; even so far as the field of Waterloo, and she pictured that wounded man

and brave Colonel Everard, and she wished that such a hero could come to her now; she knew she should feel brave herself then. She was very nearly dreaming about him with her eyes shut, when she heard a voice close to her, saying: "Where is she?"

"Here! here! O Redge, I am glad," she cried; then, as he knelt down by her, and, raising her head against his shoulder, insisted upon her drinking some brandy and water from his pocket-flask, she murmured, "And I am so very sorry!"

"Dear old Hess! it is we who have to be sorry, but I must get you home before we say anything else."

But she insisted on telling him something before she would allow him to move her. She drew his head down close to hers, and whispered: "No! but you don't understand. I was so—*so* sorry about my horrid trick, and about your losing *that;* and so, I was going to London to see Mr. Seymour, and to tell him it was all my fault, and that you would do beautifully for what he wanted."

Reginald thought her mind must be wandering; and he just stroked back her hair from her eyes, and signed to Joss to come forward; then she was lifted into a blanket slung on poles, and carried between them. His dread was lest they should meet any of the others before getting her into the house; but Hester's own surmises were pretty well correct. So much accustomed was every one to her absenting herself in the day time if anything had disturbed her equanimity, that they were not sufficiently anxious about her to send off messengers to look for her. Certainly Dorothy and Violet were uneasy, but they were prevented from

letting their uneasiness take any substantial form by Mr. Tracy telling them both that he wished them to go for a drive with the Professor. Mrs. Tracy's headache kept her at home, and he intended remaining with her, not confessing the whole truth, that he was staying at home also on the chance of Hester's sudden re-appearance, for his heart misgave him that he had been a little hard upon her, and he wished that he had turned to look at her before he left the dining-room. Certainly the offence was a grave one. He detested practical jokes, especially when played upon elders and betters, and had frequently told his daughters so; "but then," he soliloquised again, "what a fool the man was to be so easily taken in!"

So Dorothy and Violet did their duty painfully by going for a doleful drive with the silent and aggrieved Professor; whilst Mr. Tracy paced the lawn, smoking many cigars, and pausing to listen every minute for imaginary Hesters calling his name or running along the carriage-drive.

The way seemed fearfully long to Reginald and Joss —three times the usual distance from Angel Chine to Hengisthorne. They went the shortest way, too, because they went round by the back lane. Tramp—tramp—exactly together, so as not to shake her, she lying with her eyes closed, the long thick lashes on her colourless cheeks. As ill luck would have it, who should meet them close by the gate but Hannah and the two irrepressibles—Pat and Kitty!

"Miss Hester has met with an accident," said Reginald hastily—"sprained her ankle in Angel Chine. Could you go off for the doctor at once?"

But nurse, the practical, without asking any questions, instantly decided that the man-servant should go for the doctor, and that she had better remain on the spot to do anything that was needful. Before any one could stop them, those two dreadful children had rushed on the wings of the wind, down the shrubbery-walk, through to the lawn beyond, where they descried their father; and as they ran they screamed: "Hester's dead! poor Hessie's quite dead! Redge and another boy are doing her funeral!"

In another minute they were in nurse's powerful grasp, consigned to the regions of silence somewhere, and heard no more, whilst nurse herself went quietly to break to her mistress that Miss Hester had met with a slight accident, but they hoped it would not be much.

CHAPTER XVII.

OUT OF THE VALLEY.

HESTER was lifted from the improvised stretcher by her father, and with infinite tenderness in his face did he carry her away upstairs, followed by Mrs. Tracy and Hannah. Reginald went into the lounge to wait impatiently for the doctor, and Joss waited patiently at the gate.

The doctor arrived at last, and was a long time upstairs; then, as he and Mr. Tracy came down together, Reginald could hear him ask—

"But how did it happen?"

That was precisely what nobody knew except Hester herself, and she was asking for Reginald.

"I think she wants to tell you all about it, Redge," said Mr. Tracy, coming into the morning-room after the doctor's departure, "and she will be more quiet when she has got it off her mind."

"Only tell me first what is the mischief," said Reginald eagerly.

"A broken ankle, poor darling—not so bad sometimes, though, as a bad sprain; and she has borne the setting like a trump—never flinched in the least. But the fear is rheumatic fever; probably she had been

racing and jumping in the heat of the sun, as we know she is so fond of doing, and then, after running herself into a great heat, was forced to lie, after the fall, in that shady damp place. She keeps shivering every minute, and shows other signs of fever. Come up now, will you?"

Come up! of course he would. In that moment he would have gone anywhere—done anything for the sake of his old comrade.

There she lay, wounded indeed, but she got up a smile for him.

"But it's a secret," she said; "I only want papa and Redge."

So when there were only those three, she began at once: "I ran away, after breakfast, to go to London. I thought I would go straight to Mr. Seymour and tell him that his secretary was all right—all ready for him, only there had been a wretched mistake through me. And then, as I was on my way to the station, I remembered that I had no money for my ticket, so I turned back and went down to Angel Chine, and was dreadfully miserable. I thought I could never come back again, because of what you said, papa, and because of what I had done to Redge. Then all at once I thought of my watch. I could sell that. It was for Redge's sake, you know, and I didn't see how else I could go to London. So I began scrambling up the Chine in an awful hurry, and somehow I slipped. I did think that if I could only have got to London, it would all be made right, and that then I might be Redge's vagabond again, and your awkward Hess, papa—and," she very nearly added, "perhaps my

backbone would have grown an inch or two,"—but nothing else came but a very heavy sigh, and the words: "I did tell the Professor I was very sorry, you know, after breakfast."

Foolish Redge was too "choky" to speak; foolish Mr. Tracy was the same. To both of them there was something pathetic in the fact that it was the deep love in the heart of that wild schoolroom girl, whose want of head was her constant grievance—her deep love, and the sorrow born of it—which had driven her out into self-exile, until she could atone for her offence by mending what she had marred, setting out all alone on her long journey, her pilgrimage of expiation; picked up, bruised and broken, but with the spirit of their own Hester still in her.

"You don't either of you speak," she sighed again, "and indeed I am so sorry."

Then her father bent over her and kissed her, and murmured: "You must not talk any more, my darling. You must just lie still. Hess of the awkward squad indeed, but dearer than all the very best regulars!" Upon which she hugged him as he kissed her again.

And Reginald came away from the window, and, taking her hand, said: "You dear old vagabond! I mustn't stay any longer now, because Joss and I have an hour's reading to do before dinner. I shall be up to-morrow morning."

"Joss!" she repeated, "why, Redge! *are* you going to teach him, then?"

"I am going to try," he replied.

"I expect he'll teach you as he taught me," she said,

with something like the old malicious twinkle in her eyes, which delighted both men.

Then, as he lingered, Mr. Tracy signed to him that he had better go; and so, to quote the words of the old book which Joss read to her, she "gave him one smile, and bade him God-speed"—not in words, but by being just Hester.

. . . . . .

The Professor's lecture never came off after all, for when he returned from his drive with Dorothy and Violet, he was so much distressed to hear of his little friend's accident and suffering, and the cause of it all, that he was fairly upset, which means that one's brain-power gets swamped in a flow of feelings which come from the heart; and when that happens, how can any one's imagination and memory go back to the time of the ancient Britons?

Violet was sitting in the room with Hester when her tray of tea was brought in by nurse; and after that good woman, with the most thoughtful care, had arranged everything very temptingly and comfortably, and then left her, Violet, watching her, saw that she did not attempt to touch her tea or toast.

"Don't you like it, Hess?" she asked.

Hester shook her feverish head solemnly, and said: "I can't touch it, Vi—I mustn't—there are still two more days—no milk and no butter till then."

"But this is all so good for you," argued Violet, "and you are ill, and you must have nice things when you are ill."

"Vi! I would give up anything for the sake of that backbone which papa wants me to have, and which I

want to describe to Redge. And where is the backbone, if I *say* eight days, and knock off two?—take it away, and bring me some more. Nurse can have this, or the little ones—it won't be wasted."

But Violet's perplexity was smoothed away by their father's footsteps on the stairs, for when she heard it she immediately went out to him in the passage, and what she said to him out there Hester never knew; but in a few minutes he came into her room alone, without Violet, and, seating himself beside Hester's bed, he said—

"Hess, my darling, you mustn't think of backbones now; you must just take everything that we give you, as it is put before you."

"Then you must take the will for the deed," she said, putting her head down on his shoulder; "for indeed, ever since that schoolroom tea, when you told me I was a mollusc—the day after we came here—I *have* been trying to grow a backbone. I know you only said it in fun, but there was a sort of half-graveness in it. And you talked to me about being a true woman, you know, one day; and I thought I had done for that, when I saw you look and heard you speak as you did this morning. But it's all right now—I know it is when you look at me like that. And now I wonder when I shall see Joss again? Do you think Redge will keep to his reading with him? I do. I always thought he'd do it. And I do hope I shall soon get well enough to do another map—just to show that there *is* something like backbone; but I'm afraid I shan't do it to-morrow."

No, nor yet for many to-morrows; for, as the doctor

had foreseen, rheumatic fever set in. The ankle was only a question of time, but, with the rheumatism and the fever, there were fears for the heart. There were days when no one was allowed to be in the room with her but nurse, or her father, or Dorothy—days when the fever ran high, and delirium was doing its worst, or when she was equally unconscious but quiet, lying in a sort of heavy drowsiness. There came a day at last, after a very bad night of restlessness and fever, and they said it must be the turning-point one way or the other—a day when Violet felt they could not think of to-morrow at all. All the morning she had been very drowsy; and now in the afternoon deep breathing for the last hour had told the good news that she was asleep. Dorothy was sitting in the room with her alone.

It was an afternoon in May, when the hawthorns were in full bloom, and the birds were in full song, and the air outside was sweet with scent and harmony. Dorothy sat by the open window, shaded by the outside blind, which was not too low for her to see out into the garden, where in the shade, all among the apple blossoms, the children were playing, and Violet with them. Down to the gate, between the shrubberies, went Mr. and Mrs. Tracy with Reginald; he had been up at Hengisthorne all the afternoon, hoping for better news—hoping for Dorothy to come down. Nobody came up, because everybody hoped that Hester might be asleep. And so she had been for more than an hour; and now—to Dorothy, waiting and watching in this darkened room, as she looked out on the sunny world outside—came a voice from the pillows: "Is any one there?"

"Yes, dear, I am—Dorothy," said her sister, at her side in a moment.

"I wish Joss would come and read to me, Do!"

"Joss, darling? Joss Compton?"

"Yes; please let him come. I want him to read to me now about the 'Pilgrims'—and Redge must come too, and sit here and listen; nobody else. Now, please."

Then Dorothy, seeing that she was apparently conscious, but feeling a terrible heart-sinking, passed quietly out of the room, and asking nurse, who was in the nursery close by, to take her place for a few minutes, she went swiftly through the garden and joined the trio at the gate. They all turned as she approached, and every face beamed as she announced that Hester had been sleeping quietly for an hour; "but she has asked for such a strange thing"—went on Dorothy, with a troubled face—"she insists upon Joss Compton coming to read the *Pilgrim's Progress* to her now."

"And so he shall!" said both Mr. Tracy and Reginald together. "What is to prevent it?"

"It does not *sound* like her," sighed Dorothy; whilst Mrs. Tracy said anxiously—

"If he could come quite clean, and not smelling of fish or tar, I don't see why her wish should not be gratified, poor dear! It cannot do her more harm than refusing her, if her mind is set upon it."

"He is waiting for me now at home," said Reginald. "I know he will be washed and brushed up ready for me. I can fetch him like a shot. Go back to her, Dorothy, and tell her I will bring him directly."

So Joss, who had not seen her for weeks, was taken

into his young teacher's sick-room—he always spoke of her to Reginald as "My young mistress."

Some boys might have been very shy and very awkward under the circumstances, but Hester had said truly that Joss was not like other boys. Certainly he was neither shy nor awkward now—but felt as grave and as self-possessed as he had been the first day they ever met down in Angel Chine.

"I am better," she said, as Reginald and Joss came in together, "so you need not look so grave." It was said in a funny little tone of would-be assurance, but she could not keep it up; and added in a half whisper, as she held out a little thin white hand to Reginald first, and then to Joss, "Only you two, I want; and Redge, you will sit here—close here—and Joss will go into the window where Dorothy was sitting, and read from where Christian begins to climb the hill." Just at first Joss could not command his voice, but in a few moments he was able to begin, and the rise and fall in the tone of his voice reminded Hester of the sound of the sea. "Then I saw," he began reading, "that they went on all, save that Christian kept before, who had no more talk but with himself, and that sometimes sighingly, sometimes comfortably; also he would be often reading the roll that one of the Shining Ones gave him, by which he was refreshed"—and Hester heard it all, holding Reginald's hand, with her large dark eyes fixed upon the figure in the window, until at last she stopped the reader by saying—

"Now, please, tell us what it all means."

Joss coloured, and was silent, but only for a minute or two; presently he went on in the same low singing voice—

"It means this, I think: that we all have our Hill Difficulty; but on the way there is a House Beautiful for each of us, wherein are Charity, Discretion, Piety, and Prudence; those four will always give us rest by the way, if we make them our dearest and best friends. And the lions in the path which we so often dread, as Mistrust did, and which Porter Watchful showed to be *chained* lions, are all our fears, and anxieties, and want of trust. And many wonderful and beautiful things are shown to us when we try to be brave and to do our duty, as the Delectable Mountains were shown to Christian, on a clear day, from House Beautiful, and all this may be to prepare us for the Valley of Humiliation; and I always think the best part of the fight in that valley is where it says of Christian: 'Then indeed he did smile and look upward, but it was the dreadfullest fight that ever I saw;' for if we can smile and look up, nothing will be too hard. It was after that that the hand came to him with some of the leaves of the Tree of Life." He paused; and Reginald took advantage of the pause to say—

"Thank you, Joss; I think that is enough for Miss Hester to-day."

But Hester, turning her eyes upon Reginald, said: "But we were just close upon that other valley, Redge; and he can tell us all about it so beautifully."

Reginald felt his heart beat quickly as she spoke of "that other valley," and Joss, who had closed the book, stood by the door watching them both, and waiting for Reginald's final decision. But Reginald, who, in his love for Hester, felt a foolish foreboding because "she seemed so keen after that other valley," as he told

Dorothy afterwards, said decidedly: "Some other day, Hess—not now."

Then Joss just said gravely, "Good evening," and went away with Hester's warm "Thank you, Joss," sounding in his ears.

As Reginald turned back into the room, after closing the door quietly upon Joss, he was delightfully surprised by hearing the ghost of Hester's own laugh.

"Redge," she murmured, "it's bad of me just after all this, but I can't help it; for there's a shadow on the outside blind, made by the pear-tree branch, I think, and it *is* so like the old Professor's profile!"

Clear-headed and conscious enough, and no mistake; but Reginald, in spite of his gladness, was not going to allow her to laugh too much.

"The old Professor has sent you some beautiful hot-house grapes," he said quietly—"and now I am going to fetch Vi—she has been longing to come and see you."

And when he went downstairs he told them that the best sign of all had just appeared, in that Hester had laughed the ghost of a laugh and made the ghost of a joke.

And whilst they were all too thankful to say anything, Violet crept upstairs to take her place as nurse and sentinel—Violet the devoted who would have spent all these days in that room if she might, but until now it had not been thought advisable to let her see Hester.

Reginald and Dorothy strolled out together on to the moor; he had dismissed Joss—*Pilgrim's Progress*

having taken the place of history that evening; his thoughts were too grave for him even to think of smoking, as he talked to her of Hester.

"I had never seen her look as she looked whilst she was listening to that book," he said. "Of course, being so thin and white alters her very much, but still, as well as that, there was an expression in her face that made me think: Is she stepping into that valley herself? and, I could not help it, I *longed* to throw that fellow and his book out of the window. I couldn't stand it. Once or twice I heard her murmur the words that describe Christian's progress; 'Sometimes sighingly—sometimes comfortably.' I could hear her whispering it. And, do you know, I was a great baby, Dorothy—I could not help it! and, though she did not see it, Compton did, and he stopped almost before I told him to leave off. Then she made her blessed little joke, and I felt then somehow as if she was not too good to live after all. I, for one, am not good enough to get on without her, little brave-heart."

Just at this point Mrs. Dysie met them, on her way to Hengisthorne, and she passed them by with a nod and a smile, much in the same way as she had hidden behind the oak-chest ages ago for the sake of Colonel Everard and Miss Belinda.

The children met her at the gate with the words: "Hessie 's better, 'cos she 's been laughing again!" And Mr. Tracy wrung the dear old lady's hand as she sat in the lounge with him—Mrs. Tracy being upstairs with Hester—and he said: "My dear old friend, she is out of danger now; this afternoon's sleep has worked a miracle. If she had not recovered——" he stopped,

turning away his head, and then added, "I should *never* have forgiven myself!—my harshness would have done it all."

Now, Mrs. Dysie had once upon a time belonged to the Society of Friends, and she still sometimes, when gravely moved, spoke after the manner of a Quakeress; so now she made answer: "Nay, friend—let not thy fatherly feeling make thee weak. For, after all, our Hester was in the wrong, and thou wert right. But hers is a loving spirit, and her enthusiasm will do great things—nay, is already doing them, and not for herself only, but for others; it comes straight from her large, warm heart—but it must be tempered with common-sense from a clear, cool head; for if a woman is all heart or all head she does sorry work in the world; the two must go hand in hand." And Mr. Tracy thoroughly agreed with the little lady.

The Tracys had come down to their country house only for a month; Mr. Tracy's professional work could not spare him for a longer time. Hester's invalid state of course prevented the others from returning when he did, but as soon as she reached the borders of convalescence all anxiety on Mrs. Tracy's side went over to the London home: Mr. Tracy's loneliness—Violet's school arrangements—Dorothy's engagements, lectures, etc.—children's summer wardrobe.

So, when Mrs. Dysie proposed a plan one day that promised to simplify matters vastly, it was instantly agreed to, and thought delightful. The plan was this: that Hester should stay with her until August, when they would all be down at Hengisthorne again.

"I will take every care of her," said the good lady—

"she shall not be dull, and, as she gets stronger, she shall not be idle."

No one who knew Mrs. Dysie could doubt that latter statement, nor the former either.

So Hester found herself duly installed in one of the verandah bedrooms, and the rest of the Tracy family travelled back to London. Poor Violet envied her sorely, and only restrained her tears as she thought of Hester's good luck. For was it not an enviable lot to have a bedroom with a balcony—to be *the* one to be considered—and to hear Mrs. Dysie's old-world stories day after day?—to say nothing of daily visits from Redge.

If it was a halcyon time, certainly Hester recognised it as such, which is more than we do, some of us, when we grow older; more's the pity, for it is quite as essential to know when we are happy as to know when we are *un*happy.

Of course she did not like saying good-bye to them all, especially as she had not got up more strength than would allow her to sit up in her bedroom. But dear Mrs. Dysie was so good to her that first afternoon of their departure; she would not leave her at all, but read to her, talked to her, made her laugh with her, and told her that Redge was coming over to see them in the evening, after his dinner. In fact she very soon made Hester as happy as only those people can do whose one thought is for others—never for themselves.

CHAPTER XVIII.

EUREKA!

DAY by day Hester's strength came creeping back to her; and when Reginald had once carried her down to the drawing-room, she was to be found there every day after dinner, until at last she did all but come down to breakfast. Often does she look back now upon those "sofa days," as she calls them, and always sees them in a verandah framing, with summer scents and insect sounds coming in at an open window, and Mrs. Dysie's little quaint figure in and out of it all. For the greater part of these early summer days was spent on the drawing-room sofa, save when she went out for a drive with Mrs. Dysie in her queer little carriage, which had a hood that looked as if it did not belong to it. Sometimes Mrs. Treherne would take her for a drive; for Mrs. Treherne was kind-hearted, and anxious to do all that she could for Reginald's Hester—although her "boisterous hoidenism" would always shock her. But Hester's boisterous hoidenism was on the wane; not her love of fun—for she would cease to be Hester without that, and besides, *that* never leaves a nature entirely, although the grave and solemn hours of life may touch it with a chastening hand as the years go

by. No! Hester's love of fun was not dead, by any means, but there was a love of something higher, which had grown stronger within her—a love of all that is pure and honest and good—which had been called out into its first ardent blaze on that afternoon when Joss had read to her, and spoken to her about the "Pilgrims."

One evening Reginald had come over after dinner, as he so often did, and found Hester curled up in a large, low wicker arm-chair by the drawing-room window, clematis and jasmine nodding and smiling in upon her outside—Mrs. Dysie nodding and smiling inside.

As soon as Reginald appeared, however, that lady gave notice that she must go out for a walk, not having had one all day.

On his protesting that she was an extraordinary person, to go out when everybody else was coming in, she told him, in her dry way, that she never had done things as other people did them, nor did she ever wish so to do.

"I wonder if Mr. Dysie was half as nice as she was," remarked Hester when she had gone. "You see, we never knew him, and he never seems to have had a Christian name, which I don't like—perhaps he was much older than his wife."

"My mother would tell you that he was one of the most fidgety men she ever knew," replied Reginald, flinging away his cigar-end, as he stood on the gravel outside, "but very fond of music. By the by, what a genius Joss has for music; he has charmed my mother with that violin of his. I happened to be out in my boat one evening, and I landed at Angel Chine,

and caught him in the act. I got him to bring it up with him the next time he came up to read, and my mother overheard it and was charmed."

Hester's eyes sparkled.

"But still," went on Reginald, "*that* is not to be encouraged as his calling in life, for *teaching* is his work most decidedly. As to his memory, I never knew anything like it."

Hester's eyes more than sparkled now, as she said: "Redge! how glad I am to hear you say this. I wish you would come inside, for I have something very particular to say to you, and Mrs. Dysie knew I had, and that 's why she went out."

He stepped in at the window, and seated himself at the end of the couch by her chair.

"Once upon a time," she began, "I wanted to give you my weekly money for building a lighthouse, do you remember? It was one evening in the spring—such a long time ago it is now—do you remember, Redge?"

"Yes—he remembered that evening perfectly.

"Well! *now* I want to give it you for something else. *Can't* you do without Joss as a gardener's boy,—any one would do for that,—and send him to a college where they train schoolmasters? I heard Mrs. Dysie talking about one the other day, to some one calling here. I would pay you my weekly money every week towards it—I would indeed! It would be very little, but perhaps it would be a help."

The large eyes looked very wistful, and there was a little tremble about the mouth, which would have made her request irresistible, even if Reginald had not fully made up his mind already on this subject. But he

had done so. During Hester's illness he had been thinking very much about Joss; in fact he could scarcely separate one from the other—whenever he saw Joss now he thought of Hester. So now he answered in this way—

"We have been thinking of that for some time now, Hess, and it is all very nearly settled. He will most likely be shipped off in the autumn to —— College, and then you will have to find my mother another gardener's boy. We will accept that from you instead of your weekly money."

Hester's delight was speechless.

"And who do you think has been our great help?—in fact, it is through a friend of his that we have heard of the right place to send Joss to." She could not guess.

"Prepare your eyebrows for their highest possible stretch—the Professor!!!"

Hester's eyes did indeed open wider than ever, and this time she was speechless from surprise, after one long, gasping, "O *Redge!*"

"So we are a triumvirate—you and he and I," went on Reginald; "two vagabonds and a Professor."

"But I would rather," said Hester at last, with one of her deepest sighs, "that he had heard of something for you, to take the place of that secretaryship."

"Would you, little one? Ah! but I can wait, and I can make ready. I am reading now six hours a day, abjuring all such frivolities as tennis, and am going off to Scotland with a reading-party in August."

"Oh!" and such a round "O" it was! "Just when the others will be coming down here again."

"Can't help it. I shall wait to get a sight of them,

but if I were to be here the whole time, the chances are that I should not read a single day. Now, when I am away, perhaps I may read one day out of six. I have to make up for lost time, you see. Why this grave face, my vagabond?"

"Why—because it almost seems," replied Hester, very gravely, "as if you were becoming another Professor, or might grow into one. I *quite* see that he is a very kind man—and I shall never call him 'the old dry stick again'—but still——I *don't* think Dorothy would like it, and you would always be thinking me *terrible*. For I haven't turned into a bookworm yet, and I don't think I ever shall."

"Nor shall I, my dear old Hess. But although I shall never grow into a worthy Professor, still, I am bound to develop a backbone—remember that. You have got a long start of me. Here comes Mrs. Dysie's poke-bonnet over the palings. We might ask her to tell us the story of Colonel Everard and the tall Miss Belinda again. Shall we, this evening?"

. . . . . .

One afternoon in August, when harvest was in full swing, and blossoms had passed into fruit long ago, Hengisthorne was open again, and the Tracys had all come down from London. Hester had received more kisses than had ever fallen to her lot before in the course of one afternoon. She had hoisted her flag from the "lookout" chimney, and it fluttered gaily on the breeze as the carriages drove in at the gate. That the said flag was one of her father's best silk pocket-handkerchiefs, which he had left behind him, was of very slight importance.

Greetings, questions, answers, laughter, absorbed the first half-hour; and schoolroom tea absorbed the next.

Hester observed that Violet's frock was now a dress, and almost touched the floor; also she noticed that her plaited tail was coiled round into a knot like Dorothy's. These two imposing effects made her refuse, when Violet suggested that she should preside at tea instead of herself. "No," she said, "she liked to see Vi seated behind the old tea-pot; besides, was not her father coming in to tea?—and of course she must have her usual place beside him."

What fun—what delicious fun that schoolroom tea was!

In the midst of it all "Miss Hester" was summoned to speak to "Mr. Compton."

Turning to the others, she said: "It is Joss. He has come to say good-bye. He goes to his college to-morrow."

With this short and startling announcement she vanished. In the housekeeper's room stood Joss, waiting for her.

"I haven't had time to come up before, Miss Tracy," he began at once. "I couldn't go away without saying good-bye to you—when you've done it all. It was *you* began reading to me, and you told Mr. Treherne; and now he's doing this for me; and it's him that's got my mother the lodge at Ravensleigh gate. And I don't know how to thank him; nor how to thank *you*, for the matter of that. He's a gentleman that'll do good in his generation, for he's got backbone, that he has! And as for you, Miss Tracy, I can only say—Bless your kind womanly heart!"

And when Hester went back to the schoolroom she thought nothing of what had been said to her, save those words about Reginald, which she repeated exultingly; so that Dorothy, with something in her face she would fain not show, moved away to go and dress for dinner. Reginald, who was starting for Scotland in a day or two, was coming up to dinner that evening.

"Dear, don't excite yourself too much," said gentle Mrs. Tracy, as she rose to follow Dorothy, but paused at Hester's chair to lay a hand on her shoulder, and kiss the face that was flushed and radiant, but paler and thinner than it was in the spring. "And don't forget," continued her mother, "that the dear children will be disappointed if you do not go to them whilst they are undressing."

Then she also left them, and Mr. Tracy, laughing at Hester's excitement, asked with considerable interest who was sending Joss Compton to college?

"Who—why—*Redge!* And he's not going to stay down here long. He's going off to Scotland with a reading-party. And then, later in the autumn, he thinks of making a grand tour with a very clever friend—but *not* the Professor—(poor old Professor, he's a kind old thing). You know, Redge would *much* rather stay here through August—ten thousand times rather—for his going to Scotland has *nothing* to do with grouse. No, it hasn't indeed; but he's just what Joss says—a gentleman that's got a backbone. And I was the first to find it out, and you *won't* say so."

But her father seemed bent upon not saying a word as to Reginald's promise of backbone; indeed he com-

pletely changed the subject by announcing that Violet had carried off prizes enough for two.

"Strange to say," he added, "she did not seem to care for one of them without you."

"I shall never be as clever as Vi," said Hester, rubbing her cheek against her father's; "but I need not be a mollusc for all that, need I?"

"My darling, I wish you would forget that," said her father fondly, whilst the tears started to foolish Violet's eyes.

"No, I shan't," said Hester decidedly, "because it stirred me up more than anything you have ever said. Hark! there's Pat calling me," and she slipped away from her father with one kiss, and as she passed behind Violet's chair took a tempting hairpin out of her neat coil, thereby letting the whole fabric down.

In a minute she was up in the well-beloved nursery.

"Now, you children! you're not going to tire Miss Hester," began nurse, as Pat and Kitty rushed upon their sister with one bound. Hester herself was not up to a romp, and, being a novelty, for a wonder they did as she wished; for they allowed her to sit on the deep window-seat, with Pat perched on the window-sill above, legs dangling, and Kitty on her knee, explaining to them that, as she was not Vi, she could not tell them wonderful stories. She could only tell them the true story of a boy who had a fisherman father who died, and a kind gentleman friend who looked after the boy, and gave him what he wanted at last.

"We all get what we want, don't we?" said Pat,

kicking out jovially from the window-sill. Nurse shook her head solemnly over the bath, from which a cloud of steam was now rising, a sign that it was time for undressing preparations to begin.

Pat maintained his ground. "Don't we?" he said again; "what do *you* want, Hess?"

"A *head!*" said Hester, somewhat mournfully.

"Bless me! Miss Hester!" said nurse, "don't you go saying such things! you 'll make them children believe you 've got none on your shoulders."

Hester certainly did regret that answer of hers when Pat began immediately to sing out: "Hessie 's got no head! Hessie 's got no head,—like my poor dray-horse!"

But a voice behind them said, sternly enough: "She 's got something much better, sir! and that is a heart."

Turning, they saw Reginald and Dorothy. Reginald, who had just arrived, in faultless dinner attire, had come up to see the children, who were too tired to come down that evening, and Dorothy, just dressed for the evening, had met him on the stairs and turned back with him.

Later on in the evening, when Mrs. Tracy was asleep on the sofa, and the three girls, seated together on the ottoman, were talking together over all that had happened during the summer, Mr. Tracy and Reginald joined them from the dining-room, and Hester thought, as she watched them coming into the room, that they looked just like father and son.

Reginald, bending over the ottoman, whispered something to Dorothy, who instantly stepped out of

the window with him into the garden, and there they paced up and down the gravel walk together, forgetful of time and everything and everybody.

Then came Hester's triumph. She was tired, and moved for bed earlier than usual. As she perched herself on the arm of her father's chair and wished him good-night, he said: "Good night, my daughter; mamma is right to send you off now, for you have many lost roses to pick up. Will it gratify you to know that I have this night made a discovery—the discovery that Redge has a backbone, and a growing one?"

With one bound impulsive Hester went from the chair out at the drawing-room window, appearing before those two in a somewhat startling manner.

"O Redge!" she exclaimed, "you *have* got it; at least *I* knew you had, but now papa sees it, and believes it. I *am* so glad!"

Both stood staring at her.

"Got what?" asked Reginald, who did not feel deficient in anything at that moment.

"*Backbone!*" she said emphatically. With that she was vanishing again, but he, stirred by a host of strange glad feelings that were moving him that night, caught her, and, while Dorothy kissed her for good-night, he did the same, saying, "It was my old comrade Hess who did it all."

Then, feeling that her heart was indeed larger than her head, she darted away from them all upstairs to bed, where she lay awake for a long time, thinking of Joss and the *Pilgrim's Progress*, and of the great hopes and endeavours that lay before her and before them all —of the very great deal that she had to learn and to

do and to be, and of all the beautiful things that lay waiting in a golden future.

For Mrs. Dysie was right: Hester's enthusiasm was born to help, not herself, but many others; and the love from which it sprang is a marvellous power, because it helps us to love those things which we naturally dislike for the sake of those we love, for whose sake Hester never thought any pain too great. Therefore she grew up into the right sort of woman, as her father had predicted once, and Reginald always.

THE END.

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